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## Reflections on COVID-19 and our community

Christopher Cotching

Throughout the COVID experience there have been many challenging and thoughtful times. Together with my students, staff, and parent community I needed to understand what was happening as COVID events emerged. I experienced a range of emotive and social responses as a leader, but also as a recipient from others. There was an urgency to give direction, clarity, and assurance; to act quickly and decisively; to strive with a sense of positive actions to ensure all were safe, cared for, and comforted in what still remains unclear.

This was made particularly difficult by the utterances of opposing politicians and governments, and a Department that, despite their best efforts, was clearly experiencing difficulty in providing direction in a timely manner. This is respectfully acknowledged and forgiven in such times and, despite some inert feelings of temporary abandonment, without hubris I experienced a prevailing sense of foreboding that I was responsible to make this work. My professional protocols around communications felt challenged. I needed to lead very differently, and I needed energy, resilience, gratitude, and optimism with those I needed and who needed me, and they needed to see that it was so.

Initially, this was difficult for our older students who by mid-March could no longer enjoy the challenge of leadership roles with school assemblies, or no longer partake in inter-school sports or excursions and, conversely, they had to progressively prepare for remote learning. Together with my wonderful staff and Assistant Principal, we incrementally addressed each change: the perceptions by children about what seemed to be happening in their lives; and the increasing anxiety of parents about the virus and what effect it would have on them, their lives, and the safety of their children.

There was inordinate preparations of work requirements and IT provisions for staff that needed to be completed, with inadequate but needed resources. As each of my staff



met this demanding and daunting challenge, I came away feeling awe and gratitude about what they were continually achieving with a relentless moral purpose.

The positive identification of COVID-19 within our parent community later drew further anxiety from parents and staff, particularly those with vulnerability in themselves, their partners, or extended family members. In the mire of this relentless demand on time and focus, I become increasingly resolute about where I needed to make my priorities: exhausting collaboration, affirmation and negotiation of key matters, swift adept decision making, and then timely communication about what needed to occur. In essence, this was all about the safety and welfare of children and staff and it became my obsession as I

quickly removed distractions that, while important, were not high priority at this time.

As we start come out of this pandemic, I see a recalibration of sorts as we strengthen some of the prevailing experiences that need reform and restoration, but also acknowledge the championing of the new learnings made. It is with trepidation that I relish the return of our students soon, but also a sense of hope and optimism about the restoration of community and hopefully never-to-be-repeated experiences of students and staff.

**Christopher Cotching is the Principal at Chatham Primary School and can be contacted at [chatham.ps@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:chatham.ps@edumail.vic.gov.au)**

## Staying at home in Lockdown

Di and Peter Weetman

As we are in our 70s and retired, we are comfortable being at home most of the time. We have adapted to flu shots while sitting in the garden at the Doctors' Surgery, Zoom meetings, a church service on YouTube, and chatting with family on Facetime.

Having both lived in Mont Albert and Surrey Hills for most of our lives, we know and understand the importance of 'community'. During daily walks in the area, we talk about friends who lived in the various houses we pass, and remember the Dairy on the corner of Windsor Crescent and Arthur Street, and St. Georges Church on the corner of Mont Albert Road and St. Georges Avenue where we met as teenagers, and were married 52 years ago.

We support our local 'village' shopping strip - Hamilton Street - fondly remembering the kind lady's Milk Bar (now



Churchill's), Mr Moresby's Drapery (where I worked as a teenager), and others. We remember walking to Surrey Theatre in Union Road on Saturday afternoon, and to Box Hill Pool and Surrey Dive where Mr Pruden demanded to know if we were old enough to go through the gate to the Dive. Now, as we wander around the neighbourhood, we meet so many people out with their dogs, bikes, and prams, all enjoying sunshine and magnificent autumn



leaves that are such a delight. We are missing our classes at the Neighbourhood Centre, going to the Library and the cinema, and being able to sit down with friends to enjoy our coffee. We have not had time for the 'Spring Cleaning' yet, so maybe we will leave that until the Spring!



**The new/old bandstand in Surrey Gardens, just waiting for a Grand Opening and then we can use it!**

## Delayed action in Union Road

As the restrictions of COVID-19 reduce, longer term economic and employment issues are coming back in to focus. All levels of government are looking for projects that can be brought forward, and that raises the question of what is happening to the proposals for the rail crossing removals at Union Road and Mont Albert Road, and the amenity improvements in Union Road.

Local State Government MPs Paul Hamer and Will Fowles said more than a year ago that the local community would be consulted about the crossing removal designs, but that has not happened. The current inability to physically meet is not really an excuse, because many productive online meetings are being held, including Council meetings.

The 40kph speed limit and amenity improvements in Union Road Shopping Centre, including the Neighbourhood Centre, were approved by Boroondara Council two years ago, but seem to have been forgotten.

Again, the excuse that they are waiting for the rail crossing removals is no excuse at all, because this will only affect a small part of the works and that area will be reconstructed as part of the State Government work when the crossings are removed. There is some local frustration that large capital expenditures in other areas of the municipality are proceeding, but Surrey Hills is being neglected.



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NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE



## The SHNC in lockdown

So much has happened in the last two months! The last Neighbourhood News explained how we were helping with the bushfire relief effort and listed some of our exciting programs. But as the edition hit the streets, self-isolation began, and life became very different. Even though our doors have been closed to visitors due to COVID-19, our Neighbourhood Centre has been very busy behind the scenes. As soon as we heard restrictions were being put in place, we knew we had to be prepared for a number of scenarios.

In the first instance, we started thinking about how we might transition to an online environment. Since then we have helped a lot of members and tutors (who never thought they would be capable of learning or participating or teaching a class online) acquire new skills in virtual learning. For many this was a daunting process – to download, install, sign up, and log in to a new application called Zoom. But we got there! We're so proud of everyone who took the leap to keep in touch with their fellow participants, tutors and the Centre, and we have loved the feedback from people who then have gone on to use Zoom with friends and family. For us to be able to help people learn to use a tool that they can adapt to connect with other people was just as important as keeping some of our courses going.



We used our usual collaborative approach to encourage courses and activities to go online, but not everyone was comfortable or wanted this option, so we are also very much looking forward to welcoming everyone else back into the Centre in person. In this time of hardship, it has also been heart-warming to see the sense of community and generosity around us. We have built up a team of volunteers for our Community Help Program. These wonderful people provide food packages and run errands, shop, or help in any way that's asked in situations where COVID-19 has made life difficult. Coles Local Surrey Hills has again been generous in helping us out with fresh fruit and vegetables. Thank you, Nicole, for always being receptive to our requests for help.

Donations for the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre foodbank has not stopped – in fact, we are impressed with the volume of contributions still being dropped off at the Centre, by appointment. During the initial panic buying of toilet paper and ingredients like flour and sugar, it was great to see these rare and sought-after items donated to us. People who have kept donating understand that it's still important to keep supporting other groups who were already experiencing hardship before COVID-19.

Billie collected a carload of goods as part of her task in earning the hardest badge in Cubs, the Grey Wolf badge. She sent out a poster to the 1st Bennettswood group asking for donations and chose to help asylum seekers because "they are one of the most in need, due to COVID-19". Thanks for your work Billie, taking time off your home schooling to deliver these much needed goods! We love the picture with your brother Max you sent us too.

Some days I enjoy coming to the office (which is, by the way, an oasis away from my kids' home learning and a messy house) and look at the Neighbourhood Centre garden seeing people using our space to catch up with each other outdoors: a takeaway coffee from Zimt, Anne's Party, or Reunion Café, while maintaining the required distancing of



*Two of our fantastic Community Help volunteers are pictured: Chris and Yvonne Bowyer. We would like to say a big thank you to Chris and Yvonne and everyone else!*

course, and giving our community library in the garden a real workout.

Social media pages have been useful in connecting people and giving them the means to provide help and encouragement to each other. There have been book and puzzle swaps on front porches, sharing of sourdough starter as well as plant and herb cuttings, call outs for small jobs and recommendations. Can you imagine what it would have been like to have had to socially distance twenty years ago before the internet connected us?

We're still in uncertain days but I think that overall there's a sense of pride and community around Surrey Hills that yet again, when we are challenged, we draw closer together and become more supportive of each other. Those are signs to me of a healthy community.

Go to our website at [www.surreyhillsc.org.au](http://www.surreyhillsc.org.au) for more information. Contact us via email at [enquiries@surreyhillsc.org.au](mailto:enquiries@surreyhillsc.org.au) or by mobile phone on 0424 857 035. We are contactable between 10.00am-2.00pm Monday to Friday, or by appointment. If you need any assistance or help in any way, please let us know and we will provide support.

**Shima Ibuki is the SHNC Manager and can be contacted at [manager@surreyhillsc.org.au](mailto:manager@surreyhillsc.org.au)**

## Current online courses

### Ageless Grace

brain and body fitness:  
Monday 10.00-10:45am.

### Active Living 60 plus

designed for those who want to improve general overall fitness, strength, flexibility, and balance:  
Monday 8:45-9:45am.

### Book Group

reading and discussing a wide range of books while meeting new people in your neighbourhood:  
Thursday 7 May and 4 June, 7:30-9:30pm.

### Community Choir

join this local choir led by the fantastic Emily McKenzie:  
Sunday 7.00-8:30pm.

### Pilates

strengthen the deep abdominal and pelvic floor muscles that help to improve posture, body awareness, breathing and an increased sense of wellbeing: Monday 10.00-11.00am.

### Strength Training

focus on exercising core muscles using weights: Monday - Friday 9am - 10am and Tuesday 11:30 - 12:30pm

### Ukulele

have fun and experience and develop your life-long enjoyment of music through learning this compact instrument:  
Beginners: Wednesday 11.45am-12:45pm; Intermediate: Wednesday 1:30-2:30pm; Advanced: Tuesday 7.00-8.00pm.

### Women's Reflection Circle

provides a sacred space for mature women to honour and support each other, share wisdom and life experiences, and learn from each other: Fridays 1, 15, and 29 May and 19 June: 10.00am - 11:30am

### Yoga

enjoy the benefits of hatha yoga, which involves a set of physical postures (yoga poses) and breathing techniques, practised more slowly and with more static posture than other types of yoga:  
Monday 6.00-7.00pm



## Art Style Gallery celebrates five years in Union Road

Art Style Gallery opened its doors five years ago in June 2016, and we were overwhelmed at how quickly the local community embraced us. Everyone knows if they are popping into the dry cleaners or picking up a prescription, they are always welcome to stop by, have a chat, and enjoy the art on the walls! It is this community spirit that links each one of us to a greater place of belonging beyond our home and front gate, making the current COVID-19 situation endurable.

We reopened on Monday after six weeks playing our part in protecting the community and our families and enjoyed the time at home nurturing our families, but were worried about what the future entailed, and to some degree still are. It has been heartening to see so many familiar faces popping in to welcome us back. Our original mission to support local and Australian artists and artisans as much as we can continues with an ever-growing collection of artists. Artwork and custom framing are what we love and do. We would like to take this opportunity to thank each one of you for looking out for one another and ask that you continue to do so and "Stay Safe"

**Leda and Jen are at Art Style Gallery, 148 Union Road, Surrey Hills, phone 9041 8278.**

## Building back better

Enjoying these beautiful autumn days makes us feel that the climate disaster, which scientists say is ahead, is pure imagination. But then again, who would have imagined we'd be where we are today with a pandemic sweeping the world? It was predicted to occur because of the way we increasingly invade the space for wildlife and destroy the separation that formerly existed, just asking for the transfer of a virus which has occurred. Will not happen we all thought. Don't say we didn't warn you, said the scientists.

At least we can rebuild from this crisis and try to prevent it recurring. What about the looming prediction of irreversible climate change? Nah, it will not happen, we might think. Unthinkable – just look at these perfect days. Let's focus on how to get back to business as usual. This is not the time for concern about the climate. Right?

Wrong! This is the perfect time to heed what science, and those who have cared to look closely, have seen written on the wall. Stop before it's too late! Now is the time to stop adding fuel to the fire of global warming. Now, when re-building the economy beckons, now, when this gift of a rethink exists, we need to make decisions enlightened by seeing what we've already done to our world. Now is the time to shape our world differently. Time is up for fossil fuels so let's build our economy around the way we want to live in the future. We know how to do it, that's not the problem. It needs strong community and political to implement it. Autumn days like this should be loved by the next generation too.

Environment Victoria is encouraging local conversations about how we can build back better from the economic and social disruption of the coronavirus pandemic. Have look at how you can survey our neighbourhood for ideas. Go to <https://tinyurl.com/y79e2kcx>

**Carolyn Ingvarson is Convenor of Lighter Footprints and can be contacted at [ci@the.inter.net.au](mailto:ci@the.inter.net.au)**

## Meals on Wheels, from Bread Street

A local Meals on Wheels project is providing 76 aged, disabled, or needy people with a two-course meal. In addition, two pieces of fruit and a bread package is supplied. The service is funded and run by Bread Street, Hamilton Street, Mont Albert. The meals, delivered twice a week, on Monday and Friday, is supported by local Box Hill MP, Paul Hamer who provided the State Government COVID-19 guidelines. Whitehorse Councillors Mayor Sharon Ellis and Blair Barker have also given their approval. The project will continue until the virus threat passes and the aged and vulnerable are able to safely leave their homes again. **Phone 9890 0066 for more information.**

## Staying positive

My ever-optimistic mother is keeping a list of positive things that have happened during the COVID-19 pandemic, and I thought I might try and do the same:

- Spotting teddies and rainbows in the windows around Surrey Hills for the young (and the young at heart).
- David Winter from Bread Street, who along with his team of volunteers is taking on the tremendous task of cooking and delivering meals twice a week to those who are frail and unable to leave their homes. Thank you, David!
- Walking along Windsor Crescent and seeing neighbours sitting on camping chairs on their nature strips, chatting to each other across the street.
- Families of all ages out together walking, riding, and playing on ovals - this warms my heart.
- Hearing of Zoom classes for enthusiastic ESL students held by the Surrey Hills Presbyterian Church.
- Strangers greeting each other on the street, but still giving each other a wide berth.

In the midst of difficulties and perhaps grief for many of us, we can still have a lot to thank God for. What will you be thankful for?

**Wendy Moody is a member of St Stephen's Presbyterian Church**



## Flowers for a crazy world

As a retailer in the crazy COVID-19 world, I had two options: stay open, or close my business. Fear of the unknown told me to close, but my gut feeling told me to stay open. After lots of handwashing, sanitising, and non-contactless delivery, sending flowers was still possible, mostly through phone and on-online orders. Trade has escalated and we have been super busy. Florists had suddenly and unexpectedly become a medium to communicate with loved ones and friends during these uncertain times. Visiting people was not an option, so birthdays, new babies, and bereavements were acknowledged through flowers. Mothers' Day was the biggest weekend we have had in 12 years, with above average flower deliveries. Melbourne had sold out of most flowers after Mothers' Day week due to the huge demand.

As Traders we have also had a duty of care to our customers and implemented new procedures so our goods could still be purchased or delivered within the COVID-19 guidelines. I am hoping the positive for myself and the Village is to gain new customers that had previously shopped elsewhere. I have no doubt normality will return, perhaps just a different normality to what we have all been accustomed.

**Nell Rose is the Mont Albert Florist at 1 Hamilton Street, Mont Albert, phone 9890 1122.**



Most of the businesses in Mont Albert Village that have remained open have prospered. People have chosen to shop here rather than head to the larger shopping centres.

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# The Boulevard Food Store and COVID-19

Marnie and Kendall explain that the concept of The Boulevard Food Store was built on many great memories in sharing great food and wine with family and friends. Having operated large venues in the past, in 2018 we looked at opportunities that would enable us to work in our local community. We wanted to share what we love in our local neighbourhood, a space to share what we love and enjoy.

The food, homewares, and specialist groceries we supply in our food store have been sourced from regions that we have come across during our many travelling

adventures. Working in conjunction with our chefs, our menu takes inspiration from some of our favourite foods and cuisines. Our wine list comprises of some of our favourite wines and our homewares have been inspired by pieces that we love.

All had been going 'swimmingly' - then we were all faced with Covid-19. Since March, we have had to take a new direction. We had to re-invent ourselves very quickly. We moved into producing take home foods that reflects our experiences. -These are made inhouse by our chefs and can be purchased instore or delivered to your home.

We still offer takeaway coffees, wine, and a limited menu.

While the current situation has been extremely difficult to navigate and manage, there are some good things to come out of this. The biggest of these is the support of the local community - this has been completely overwhelming. As a result, we hope to ride through the next few phases and come out the other side bigger and better!

**The Boulevard Food Store is at 369 Mont Albert Road, Mont Albert, phone 8589 1223.**



## "We are all in this together"

Every business owner, operator, vendor, and supplier is going through this crisis called COVID-19. People of all walks of life are struggling to come to terms with this new reality. Yet, in true Aussie Spirit, our beautiful community's response has been overwhelming: "How can we help?"; "Thank you for keeping your doors open"; "We will still come for our favourite coffee"

How do you thank everyone who asks, "how are you doing?" And all those who came for a second, a third coffee just because...from the first "good morning" to the last "see you tomorrow"...we are grateful for every encouraging smile. The whole community wants us to thrive and succeed; how can we not keep trying? Some of our amazing staff are sacrificing much-needed income so we can keep going. We miss their energy and enthusiasm. We are hopeful and positive that soon these walls will celebrate again, birthdays and anniversaries, friendships and catch-ups, reunions, and promotions. Until then, thank you Surrey Hills for your kindness and generosity.

**The Reunion Team 160 Union Road, Surrey Hills. Phone 9836 1442**

**Debra Carr is Director of Hello World Travel, 156 Union Road, Surrey Hills, Phone 9830 0055 or 0408 579 386.**

## Our travel is paused, but our dreams are alive

As a committed local trader, we have been delivering travel dreams for over 25 years. Our business supports the local community through schools, sporting clubs and fundraising events. At the moment we have been significantly impacted by COVID 19 with the inability to travel and we would like to thank our loyal customers and community for their patience and understanding during this difficult time. We are proud to be part of the Union Road shopping strip, a lovely hub whose history and future has and will support you and your family.

Our communication platforms are email, phone, and face-to-face Zoom appointments. The planning process for your holiday can take many months, so we have started working on detailed itineraries into 2021, along with rescheduling current travel. We are positive about a strong return to travel in the near future with great deals. We anticipate domestic tourism

to recover and borders to re-open in the coming months, so focus on your bucket list within Australia. Our country has with such beauty: Ghan/Indian Pacific rail journeys, remote walking packages in Tasmania, Queensland resorts, NT outback experiences. Contact us to discuss these Australian options and that long awaited overseas dream, and our experienced and extensively travelled staff will assist and support you and our community through these unprecedented times.

We reopened on Monday after six weeks playing our part in protecting the community and our families and enjoyed the time at home nurturing our families, but were worried about what the future entailed, and to some degree still are. It has been heartening to see so many familiar faces popping in to welcome us back. Our original mission to support local and Australian artists and artisans as much as we can continues with an ever-

growing collection of artists. Artwork and custom framing are what we love and do. We would like to take this opportunity to thank each one of you for looking out for one another and ask that you continue to do so and "Stay Safe"



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