

HARCOURT NEWS THE CORE



Edition 133 – December 2025

Produced by: Harcourt Progress Association Inc

Online: harcourtprogress.org.au/news or harcourt.vic.au/news

VMR Opens in Harcourt

Celebrations as Victorian Miniature Railway Opens in Harcourt



On December 6, the Victorian Miniature Railway (which aims to be the longest miniature railway in the southern hemisphere) opened to the public for the first time. Although the morning was wet, VMR volunteers

were out in force to welcome guests. After nearly ten years of construction and associated preparation on the site above the Harcourt township, the VMR crew were ready to welcome visitors for their first weekend of operation. Market

stalls and music supplied by local bands were set to go from 11 am, with the day to be repeated on Sunday 7. (See more about the VMR story on page 5)



State Member for Bendigo West, Maree Edwards, and emcee, Pauline Wilkinson, were among the invited guests who enjoyed a train ride.



CONTENTS

- HPA Update – 3
- Seen at Xmas Gather – 4
- VMR Opens – 5
- Pop-Up Clinic – 6
- Councillor Comment – 7
- HVPS – 7
- Harcourt CWA – 8
- Support Our Own – 9
- Harcourt Uniting Church – 10
- Harcourt Lions Club – 10
- A Crouquet Champion – 12
- Bendigo West Update – 13
- Harcourt CFA – 14
- Dhelkaya Health – 15
- The Heritage Centre – 16
- Harcourt Bowling Club – 17
- Harcourt Valley Landcare – 19
- Community House – 20
- Good News from Dhelkaya – 22
- Weather & Water – 23
- Grace Church – 23
- Gardening – 24
- Council News – 25
- Xword – 26
- Sudoku – 27
- Christmas Carols in the Park – 28

DEADLINES & PUBLICATION DATES

We aim to publish online by the 6th of the month. The deadline for submissions is the 24th of the month prior. Advertisers and community groups will be sent reminder emails. There is no edition in January.



COMMUNITY DIARY

Tuesday December 9: 9.30 am–12 pm, Healthy Towns Pop Up Clinic, Coolstore Café, Coolstore Road, Harcourt.

Sunday December 14: 4.30 pm–7 pm, Carols in the Park; free barbecue and craft for children. Visit by Santa (see Page 28).

Thursday December 25: 8.30 am Christmas Service at the Uniting Church, Buckley Street, Harcourt.

Wednesday December 31: 6 pm until midnight Gather Harcourt News Year's Eve. (See page 12).

Monday February 16: Deadline for nominations for Harcourt Lions Youth and Community Member of the Year (see page 11).

Carpet Bowls: 7.30 pm Wednesdays, Leisure Centre, Bingham Road, Harcourt.

CFA: Brigade meets at 8.00 pm on the third Monday of each month. Sunday morning equipment checks and maintenance runs start at 9.00 am. Siren is tested on the first Sunday of the month at 9.15 am. Contact: Captain Andrew Wilson for further details 0428 387 339. CFA is located at 56 High Street, Harcourt.

Community House: See page 20 for December activities. Open each Wednesday from 10:30 am to 2:30 pm, closed in school holidays.

CWA: First Thursday of the month, 1.30 pm at Harcourt Leisure Centre, Bingham Road, Harcourt.

Grace Church: Tuesdays at 10.30 am – Morning tea and prayers; Sunday Service at 11.00 am; 30 Buckley Street, Harcourt. Tuesday evenings at 7.30 pm – Zoom Bible Study: A Christian discipleship course covering the basics of the faith. All welcome, you can commence at any time. Please contact the Pastor for a link: pastor@gracecastlemaine.org.au

Harcourt Bowls Club: see page 17 and the website: www.harcourtbowlingclub.com.au

Harcourt Lions Club: Third Monday of the month at the Victorian Miniature Railway, Harmony Way at 6.30 pm. Gathering for dinner (something to share) followed at 7.30 pm by general planning and discussion.

Heritage Centre: Every Wednesday at the ANA Hall from 9.00 am–3.00 pm or by appointment – 0400 916 527.

Leisure Centre Committee: 7.30 pm on the fourth Thursday of each even-numbered month at the Harcourt Leisure Centre.

Pony Club: Second Sunday of the month. Contact Peggy Mills, 0419 902 400. The Pony Club is located next to the swimming pool.

Repair Café: Last Sunday of the month from 10.00 am to 1.00 pm. See ad on page 23 for more information.

Uniting Church: Sundays at 9.00 am in the Uniting Church, Buckley Street, Harcourt. The service is followed by morning tea. All welcome. Donations of food and other household needs for St Vinnies can be left at the Church door on Sunday mornings 9.00–10.00 am or contact Jan on 5474 2226, to arrange for collection.

Walking Group: Monday and Thursday at 9.30 am. Meet at the ANA Hall. The one hour leisurely walk is usually followed by morning tea, and new members are always welcome.

Victorian Miniature Railway: Open 11 am to 5 pm every Sunday. Old Calder Highway C794 just north of Barkers Creek Bridge in Harcourt.

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Harcourt - Castlemaine - Maldon

mainFM is an award winning radio station based in Castlemaine, broadcasting music, community news, talks and specialist programs and events throughout a large area of Central Victoria, serving our community.

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LISTEN LOCAL

Firstly, it has been a most humbling honour to be elected as the Chair of our Harcourt Progress Association Committee, and I enthusiastically look forward to an exciting and progressive year ahead for our great community.

I am especially delighted to extend warm greetings to our wonderful Harcourt Valley community and wish you each an enjoyable, safe and relaxing time over the coming Festive Season. May the New Year bring you and our town and district community, what we would especially wish for.

Coming Events:

Carols in the Park: I especially note the Carols Evening coming up on the 14 December, and I especially encourage our community to come along and join in the festive activities – a community BBQ, followed by Santa arriving per favour of our Fire Brigade volunteers and then Carols and entertainment ... come along and enjoy.

- ▶ 4.30 pm
Community BBQ commences
- ▶ 5.30 pm
Band commences playing
- ▶ CFA Truck arrives with Santa and meets with children
- ▶ 5.45 pm
Assemble for Carol singing
- ▶ 6.45 pm
Crowning of Royalty event - for next year's Applefest
- ▶ Christmas Greetings – from Guests
- ▶ 7.00 pm:
Event concludes.

Keep Our Doors Open

The "Keep Our Doors Open" postcard campaign – support cards for obtaining government funding for our Harcourt Valley Community House (HVCH). The cards have been dropped in our letter boxes and distributed around the district. We especially thank those of our community who have already signed and delivered the postcards.

What happens with the postcards?

Harcourt Valley Community House, along with representatives of Castlemaine Community House and Maldon Neighbourhood Centre will be presenting all postcards to the Hon. Maree Edwards MP on Thursday 11 December in Castlemaine. Postcards will still be collected after that date and will be forwarded on.

IMPORTANT: If you have not already signed and delivered a postcard, we encourage you to do so before 11 December. You can return them to a collection box at the Heritage Centre (ANA Hall), Wednesdays 9 am–3 pm, the Post Office during business hours (in a special box on the counter), Coolstore Cafe Monday to Friday, 6:30 am–1 pm or the Harcourt Valley Community House Wednesdays 10 am–2:30 pm.

Other Activities

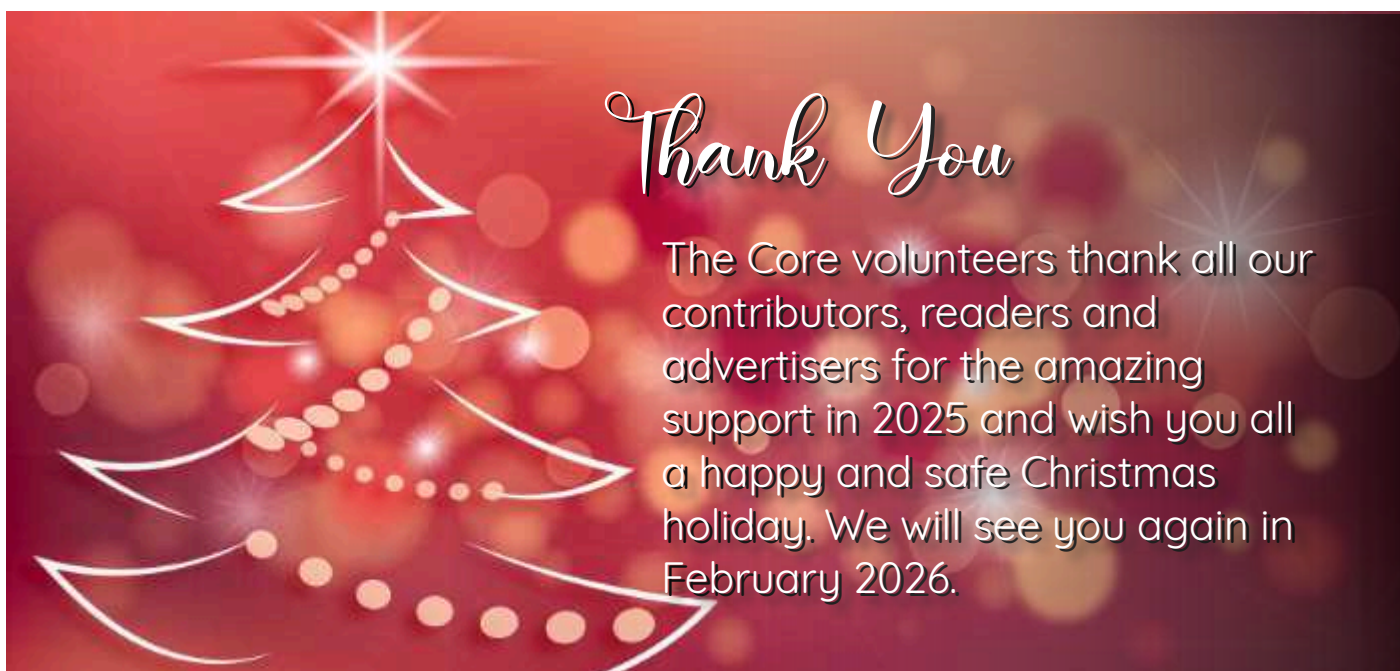
I would also extend special congratulations and appreciation to:

- ▶ The organisers of **Gather Harcourt** which, from all reports, was a successful day for stall holders, event organisers and was enjoyed by the many locals and visitors who

attended the market. We were super fortunate that the weather that day recovered from the very rainy overnight. As an aside, our HPA volunteers collected some 115 "Keep Our Doors Open" postcards at the event.

- ▶ The Official Opening of the **Harcourt Miniature Rail (VMR) complex** took place on 5th December. I extend very special congratulations to the many dedicated members of our community who have worked tirelessly for many years, to bring this most amazing and spectacular complex to reality. For those who have not visited the development, I would encourage you to do so. The views from the complex and across Harcourt township and towards the Mount, are quite spectacular. The complex is, without question, a "must visit" for all age groups. I would enthusiastically note ... the Harcourt VMR development is, without doubt, a perfect example of "how a community group can achieve its vision, if it really wants to."
- ▶ The **Trivia Night** event conducted by the Primary School Committee and held at the Bowling Clubrooms on 29 November was a most enjoyable evening. A full-house attended and joined in the fabulous fun-filled atmosphere of the evening. The crowd was enthusiastic and competitively responded to the extensive range of interesting quiz questions. Overall, a great evening and a credit to the organisers.

Ivan Gilbert



SEEN AT XMAS GATHER

Despite rain the day before, and a bit of mud in the usual places, Harcourtians, guests and visitors 'gathered' on Saturday 29 November to socialise and do a bit of Christmas shopping.

Music was provided by Harcourt's own Apple Dumplings who ripped through some great rock standards and kept the crowd entertained.

Organiser Ruth Hay, joked "If you want rain, just ask me to pick a date for a Gather Harcourt!" Overall, the day went off very well, with plenty of stall holders

Save the date for Harcourt's next Gather on New Year's Eve at the Harcourt Recreation Reserve – see the poster on page 12.



PHOTO: LOU CITROEN



PHOTO: LOU CITROEN



PHOTO: SUZANNE DWYER



PHOTO: SUZANNE DWYER



PHOTO: LOU CITROEN



PHOTO: LOU CITROEN



VMR Opens

In a letter dated 8 June 2016, VMR President Andrew Mierisch wrote to the Harcourt Progress Association setting out the Victorian Miniature Railway's intentions, laying out its plan to develop the biggest miniature railway in the southern hemisphere in Harcourt, at a perfect location on a hill overlooking the township. Andrew and his wife Karen attended a packed meeting at the Bowls Club where some contentious matters were discussed, but the mood of the meeting changed when the crowd heard their plans. And that was the start of the VMR story in Harcourt.

VMR in Harcourt celebrated with a day for the Harcourt Community in late November and held its public opening on 6 and 7 December this year. On December 5 a special function was held to say an official "thank you" to the State Government, clubs and organisations that supported the club over its nearly ten year journey.

In her welcome and introduction, Pauline Wilkinson, emcee of the day said, "So why are we here today? Well, almost ten years ago, the Christmas purchase of a block of land in Harcourt was the beginning of a vision for a wonderful community-based organization.

"The Victorian Miniature Railway is a community within this community, and they have a strong emphasis on maintaining and building friendship, the happiness and harmony of its members, visitors and community partners. They are able to inspire passion in people through the enthusiasm that the members have for the project. Volunteers and helpers gain a sense of satisfaction that they have played a part in building something significant.

"As you can see from the extensive train tracks, stunning buildings, and incredible landscaping, the members, volunteers and various community groups have spent countless hours in creating this incredible facility. The Victorian Miniature Railway has had a far-reaching effect and will continue to create incredible experiences for many people locally, nationally and internationally for years to come.

"They have a well-equipped workshop

with the ability to create new parts, replacement parts and pretty much anything else that they need to keep the trains running on time. Eat your heart out V/Line!"

Pauline then welcomed and thanked Maree Edwards, our local MLA. Maree said, "On International Volunteer Day, it seems very appropriate for me to be here to congratulate everyone associated with the VMR who have put their time and effort into one of the most significant projects in our region.

"VMR and the Harcourt Lions Club have had a close relationship from the outset of the project. In the first stages of development there was a significant win achieved by the Lions with a grant of \$200,000 from the Victorian State Government. The grant enabled the construction of the engine storage shed with the involvement of VCAL students from Castlemaine Secondary College. The students learnt valuable construction and team-work skills, and the project won a Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) Partnership Award from the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority.

"As we know, it takes people with a vision to start a significant project like this which will enhance visitation and associated economic activity, not just in Harcourt, but to Central Victoria, and I congratulate all involved."

VMR President thanked Maree and Pauline for giving their time and said,



"From that first meeting in 2016, the Harcourt community welcomed and supported us in so many ways. We have come a long way from that paddock covered in long grass under which was lurking Harcourt granite. Never underestimate the power of a volunteer! 95% of what has been built here has been done by volunteers, who pay to be here and work in their free time. We have 52 members who all have partners and families who also support us. Six families have moved to Harcourt as a result of their volunteering, and there are many others who have worn a groove in the highway between here and Melbourne. Today, we thank all the volunteer organisations and businesses who have supported VMR over the journey."

Event organiser, Bonnie Sowman, ensured that all went smoothly on the day. Following the official speeches, VMR members and guests adjourned to enjoy a delicious lunch provided by the Harcourt Produce Store. After the lunch break, Andrew presented plaques – complete with a base made from the miniature railway line – to the many people and organisations which have provided support in a multitude of ways.

After the weekend of 6 & 7 December, VMR will be open every Sunday from 11 to 5 pm.



Bonnie Sowman - Event Organiser.



View on a wet day.

HEALTHY TOWNS



POP-UP CLINIC FREE HEALTH SCREENINGS

Tuesday 9th Dec. 9:30 am – 12 noon
Coolstore Café, 32 Coolstore Rd, Harcourt



Visit the Healthy Towns Pop-Up Clinic for your free Health screening. Student nurses play a frontline role in spotting early signs of illness, promoting prevention, and guiding people toward better health. By checking key indicators like **blood pressure, heart rate, blood glucose, temperature, oxygen levels, and pain score**, they help detect risks early and support long-term wellbeing.



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Councillor Comment

Hi all,
Some rough weather around. Warm enough for a Tshirt but five minutes later you will need your coat.

Congratulations to our new Mayor, Toby Hayden and Deputy Mayor, Mat Driscoll. A lot of experience and talent at Council table so not so easy to unravel.

At MASC we are heading into budget time. Please contact me asap with your bright ideas. Let's face it dollars are very tight, but we seem to find funds for important initiatives.

My band played at the Rotary truck show this weekend gone. What a fantastic event. Other artists include Sandee Facy and Greg Champion. What a line up. Do yourself a favour and check them out when you get the chance. Now I think of it Knightmoves is playing at the VMR launch. How good is this, a major development for our Harcourt community. A special shout out to all the volunteers that have brought VMR to life.

Back on the farm the hay is wet, the garden is watered and there is feed in the paddock. You just have to roll with it.

A safe and very happy Christmas to all.

Best regards Tony

AG Cordy

0439742434



Harcourt Valley Primary School Trivia Night – Fundraiser

Our trivia evening held on Saturday 29 November was a terrific success, with a large, enthusiastic audience enjoying the opportunity to test their general knowledge on a broad range of topics. A thoroughly enjoyable six rounds of trivia hosted by Bev Orgill kept everyone entertained through the evening. The success of our evening was contributed to by a large number

of organisations listed below. A very big thank you to all our generous sponsors!

I would also like to thank the Harcourt CWA, Mrs Simpson and the Harcourt Bowls club for permitting us to host our event at the Bowls Club (at no charge), and the local and broader community for coming along, supporting our school and having a fun evening.

Thank you to our sponsors

- ▶ Billman's Foundry (Daniel and Mel Billman)
- ▶ Victorian Goldfields Railway
- ▶ ASQ - Castlemaine
- ▶ Kris Browning & Sonia Browning
- ▶ Rodilesa Nursery - Harcourt
- ▶ Jirrahlinga Dingo Farm
- ▶ Pyrenees Meats
- ▶ Love Shack
- ▶ Wai Gutsell (Ronan's Mum)
- ▶ Theatre Royal
- ▶ The Little Red Apple
- ▶ Harcourt General Store
- ▶ Luke Mannix - Harcourt Auto
- ▶ Ryan and Brooke Hughes - Trailer load of wood
- ▶ Harcourt Valley Winery
- ▶ Blackbird Cafe (Kerri from OSHC)
- ▶ Stoneman's Book Room
- ▶ Cliffords Meats

Finally, on behalf of Harcourt Valley Primary School, I would like to wish all of the Harcourt Core readers a wonderful Christmas and Happy New Year.

Andrew Blake, Principal



The Trivia night held as a fundraiser for Harcourt Valley Primary School was a huge success, with strong competition from all teams, great prizes and a silent auction. Bev Orgill, Chair of Harcourt CWA was the compere and did a fabulous job.

THE CORE

VOLUNTEERS

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Chatting with Harcourt CWA

Good morning everyone,
Bev O here again with the latest from the Harcourt CWA Branch.

Yes, you guessed it! It has been another busy month for us – some service and some fun, but all enjoyable.

At our Annual General Meeting, presided over by CWA Group President Dani Kent, we thanked the 2025 committee and welcomed in the new team for 2026: Robyn McConville is our President, Helen Hand will be our Secretary and Alison Curtis will be our Treasurer. They will be ably assisted by Joy Robertson, Lynette Carter, Meryl Adams, Jill Reynolds, Marie Twyford, Judi Kent and Bev Orgill. With a team like that in charge, 2026 promises to be another great year!

Also, at our recent meetings, we decided where our funds will be allocated. As usual, many local organisations and groups will be the recipients of our donations. Much of what Harcourt CWA receives from its fundraising is donated back to many deserving and worthy causes in our local area (hospital, school, kinder, welfare groups, and other organisations that help our community). Other money is sent in to CWA Victoria headquarters for distribution to state-wide and Australia-wide groups that work toward the betterment of women and children and families.

The CWA, or Country Women's Association of Victoria, supports a lot of social activities, supports education, seeks to combat isolation, contributes to disaster relief, and lobbies governments on issues such as women's health, domestic violence and infrastructure.

The CWA Victoria and Harcourt CWA Branch supports a variety of causes, and our speakers at many of our monthly get togethers have reflected this: we have had Di from Dhekaya Health on the Homeshare Accommodation Program, Monique from Donate Life on the Organ Donation Program and local Robyn Howarth told us of the 1972 Faraday School kidnapping and the effects it had on her, her family and the wider Faraday-Harcourt community. Our 2026 program will include more speakers of this calibre.



Pres Robyn McConville and long time member Joy Robertson at the Garden Party

Throughout the year, some of us have enjoyed helping with the Reading Program at Harcourt Valley Primary School, going in each week to hear children read, and at the Grade 6 Graduation, presentations were made to Grade 6 students.

But ... it has not been all work and fundraising and no play! We have enjoyed a lot of fun and frolics and a few giggles along the way.

Recently, we fielded a team, sold raffle tickets and helped run a successful Trivia Night for the local school which was fun, even if our CWA table was not the winner of the quiz – maybe next time.

We had a wonderful Garden Party Luncheon at President Robyn's home recently (see the smiling faces in the photo above) and our Xmas Breakup Lunch was as delicious and enjoyable as ever. This year though, Kris Kringle took a holiday: we agreed that we all had enough stuff so we donated to a

local children's charity instead.

Thank you to all of you for your support of our Harcourt CWA fundraising efforts. We will start 2026 with our Friendship Day Lunch and our fundraising year with a bang, supporting the annual local Harcourt Applefest Weekend in early March.

If you'd like more information about us or would like to join our Happy Bunch, please contact Secretary Helen on 0448 510 996 or yours truly, Bev Orgill, on 0459 324 455. We meet on the first Thursday of each month at 1.30pm at the Harcourt Leisure Centre.

Last, but definitely not least ... Harcourt CWA wishes you all Season's Greetings and all the very best for a Happy New Year 2026.

Bev Orgill

The Christmas Holidays

Mount Alexander Mail
Wednesday 28 December 1859

Both on Monday and Tuesday the ring connected with the Criterion hotel was very well attended, and some excellent wrestling took place. Some of those who preferred a quiet day in the country to the noise and bustle of Castlemaine betook themselves to Mount Alexander and formed various pic-nic parties. These quiet holiday makers had only one drawback to their enjoyment, viz., that on their returning home they were overtaken by the rain, which continued falling heavily for some time. Besides those who came into Castlemaine, many preferred a day's leisure and recreation to be enjoyed in the locality where they lived, thus, for instance, all along the line of railway in the direction of Barker's Creek and Harcourt the various hotels and grog-tents were full of men who were drinking and singing, their vocal efforts in some instances being assisted by a wandering violinist. In some localities the day's amusement wound up by a ball, where, if the dancing was not of the highest order it certainly possessed the qualification of being the product of an energetic effort. The wrestling at the Cumberland hotel was continued on Tuesday, the parties contending not being limited to any particular weight.

Support Our Own. Choose Locally Grown

Expression of Interest (EOI) – Growers and Retailers

In 2023, Healthy Loddon Campaspe (HLC) launched the Support Our Own. Choose Locally Grown marketing campaign. The campaign aimed to increase awareness and consumption of locally grown fruit and veg available in our region.

We're excited to be reintroducing the campaign again in March/April 2026, this time with a broadened scope. The 2026 Support Our Own. Choose Locally Grown campaign will showcase locally grown fruit, vegetables, grains, dairy, and lean meats/alternatives.

If you are a grower or retailer of locally grown fruit, vegetables, grains, dairy, and lean meats/alternatives based in the Loddon Campaspe region, we would love to include you in our 2026 campaign!

The Loddon Campaspe region is made up of six local Councils – City of Greater Bendigo, Campaspe, Central Goldfields, Loddon, Macedon Ranges and Mount Alexander Shires.

As part of the campaign, you will be featured on the HLC website and social



media, included on a region map of locally grown produce, and be invited to be involved in other marketing activity as part of the campaign.

For more information, visit www.healthyloddoncampaspe.au/chooselocallygrown.

Please complete this form to express your interest in being part of the 2026 campaign:

hlc.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3JZJS0WN803AWcS

And if you know of any other local growers or retailers who would be keen to be involved, please share this form with them!

Celebrate the Diggers' 1851 Monster Meeting at Forest Creek

174 years ago, on 15 December 1851, 15,000 gold diggers met at Forest Creek to defy Governor Charles La Trobe's plans to double the already unaffordable cost of their gold licence. The diggers had few rights and no vote, but they stood united against the power of the British military establishment to declare that 30 shillings was enough – they would not pay more.

And they won. La Trobe backed down and cancelled the proposed increase.

Most of the Diggers probably didn't intend to start a revolution, they just wanted to stop the plan to double their licence fee. But their Monster Meeting

began the protest movement that spread across the goldfields to demand democratic rights for all.

In 1853 the Diggers' Red Ribbon Rebellion in Bendigo forced the Bendigo government to draft a democratic Constitution that gave the vote to all white adult men. And in 1854 the Eureka Uprising in Ballarat finally ended the old order, forcing the military government to hold elections for a democratic parliament in 1855.

Maree Edwards, our Bendigo West MP, will tell the story of how Victoria transformed from a military colony to a democracy in just four years. Parks Victoria will tell why they look after the meeting site and fly the Monster Meeting flag.



Then pan for gold in the creek and walk the site where the 15,000 Diggers kick-started democracy. It hasn't changed all that much.

Organised by Chewton Domain Society & Parks Victoria. May be cancelled if Parks Victoria or the CFA are concerned about the weather.

Authorised by Pat Healy, CDS.



Harcourt Uniting Church

In the Christian Church, Christmas is a very special time when we celebrate the birth of Jesus. The four weeks leading up to Christmas day are known as Advent which means "the coming". We are preparing to celebrate the coming of the baby at Bethlehem. At Harcourt Uniting Church an Advent wreath of flowers, with five candles, will be the centre piece of our worship. Each Sunday we will light a candle for Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. On Christmas morning we will light the final candle in the centre known as the Christ candle.

To celebrate Christmas in Harcourt, the Harcourt Progress Association is organising Christmas in the Park on 14 December with activities for the children, a BBQ and Carol singing with the Thompsons Foundry Band. Santa might even call in.

On Christmas Day Thursday 25 December you are invited to join us for a service at Harcourt Uniting Church at 8.30am – nice and early so you can be home in time to put on the roast, fire up the BBQ and open presents.

At Christmas time some families struggle to provide presents and food for their families. Recently, members of churches in our area have donated funds to buy hampers and vouchers so that these families can have the enjoyment and dignity of buying their own presents and Christmas food. It is so important for them to know that someone cares about them.

Our Church Hall and adjoining land failed to sell at auction recently however, in the new year, we plan to engage



another agent and advertise more widely. The Hall and original Preschool building fronts Buckley Street with the land behind facing onto Barker Street.

With all the preparations being made for Christmas, we hope that you still find time to enjoy family and friends, opening presents and, of course, eating special Christmas treats.

Happy Christmas and may it be a time of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love as we celebrate the true meaning of Christmas.

A small child climbed onto Santa's knee as Santa asked: "What would you like for Christmas?" The child stared at him for a minute in disbelief and then said: "Didn't you get my email?"

A boy ran into the kitchen and called out to his Mum "Hey Mum, remember I said I'd like Santa to bring me a bike? Well, you don't have to worry now because I just found a bike behind your wardrobe."

Jan Jenkin



Harcourt Lions Club

The Lions' year is ending on a high note with the official opening of the Victorian Miniature Railway on the 6 and 7 December 2025 after nearly ten years of work, not only by the VMR members but with support from many others.

The Lions Club will be sharing the weekend BBQ with the Harcourt Football Netball Club, so come along and support not only VMR but your local clubs at the BBQ. It is being proposed that local clubs will be able to take a turn in holding the BBQ on each Sunday the VMR is running to allow them to raise funds for their club.

COMMUNITY MEMBER OF THE YEAR AND YOUTH OF THE YEAR

The Awards will be presented at Applefest 2026 so the work or achievements of a local Harcourtian can be celebrated by all.

NOMINATION FORMS need to be received by the Lions Club by Monday 16 February 2026. We Look forward to receiving your nomination.

The Harcourt Lions Club will be celebrating the year with our final meeting and windup at the Railway Hotel, Castlemaine on the 15 December at 6.30pm.

There is no meeting held in January.

The first meeting of 2026 will be on Monday February 16 at VMR commencing at 6.30pm with a shared meal.

WISHING ALL WORKING ON THE CORE AND ALL THEIR READERS A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY AND HEALTHY NEW YEAR FOR 2026.

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 **Bendigo Bank**
Agribusiness

*Based on Roy Morgan's survey of 1000+ Australian farmers in June and July 2024. Bendigo and Adelaide Bank Limited, ABN 11 068 049 178 AFSL 237879. 1985262-2009517 OUT_45591092, 16/06/2025





Congratulations to local croquet player Nick Quirk who recently won the Victorian Handicap Singles Championship. The two day event is held annually at the Cairnlea complex which is the Victorian Croquet Headquarters.

Let's welcome in 2026
NEW YEAR'S EVE
HARCOURT
RECREATION RESERVE

6PM - 9PM
DJ & FAMILY ACTIVITIES

9PM - MIDNIGHT
THE METCALFE BOYS
WILL ROCK THE NIGHT AWAY

FOOD TRUCKS, BBQ, DRINKS AT BAR PRICES

ADULTS \$5
SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN FREE



Gather
Harcourt NYE



MERRY CHRISTMAS

WILKINSON NOBLE
PROPERTY PARTNERS

May your Christmas be filled with
 love, laughter, and special moments!

We look forward to helping
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 Pauline 0468543589
 Sarah 0415666997

Bendigo West Update

It's hard to believe it's nearly the end of the year, with warmer days and the joy of Christmas on the horizon. After a busy year, I thought I'd touch base with a wrap of some of the Victorian Government announcements and projects you might have missed.

There's a great momentum rolling across Harcourt and Mount Alexander Shire — a steady pipeline of projects delivering real, practical wins for our community.

Back in May, I announced \$50,000 in funding to upgrade James Park, thanks to our Tiny Towns Fund.

We've just opened the next round of the Tiny Towns Fund — with applications closing in February. If you've got a great idea for a project that could make a difference in Harcourt, make sure you apply over the summer.

We're backing business as well. In March we celebrated the reopening of Blumes Historic Bakery, revived with a \$184,300 grant from the Allan Labor Government. They've expanded their offerings, created jobs and drawn visitors from across the region.

Recreation and tourism continue to flourish. Upgrades to the Goldfields Track are making it safer and more accessible for hikers and cyclists, while progress toward the region's UNESCO

World Heritage bid is drawing new interest to our towns.

And the Victorian Miniature Railway in Harcourt is set to open this month. What a thrill it's been to see this fabulous project come to fruition.

I've enjoyed catching up with members of the Harcourt Progress Association many times this year.

In October, Department of Transport & Planning staff and I hosted a session with the HPA to discuss a future Harcourt Railway Station. While there are barriers toward a future station right now, it is important for us to understand the challenges and limitations so that we can explore other options.

I'm actively working to look at how we can reconfigure Harcourt's bus service to ensure better and more frequent links to Castlemaine in the short term.

More broadly on public transport — it's been more than two years since we introduced Fairer Fares, and you can travel anywhere across the state's transport network and pay no more than \$11 per day.

From 1 January 2026, travel will be free for those under 18, with seniors enjoying free travel every weekend.

The Metro Tunnel is now open,

making it easier for you to link to Melbourne for appointments, work or visiting family. Make sure you give it a test over the summer.

This year we also opened the new \$4 million Castlemaine Health & Learning Hub, delivered with Bendigo TAFE and Dhelkaya Health, which is already training up to 60 future nurses and allied health workers at a time. Local training. Local jobs. Local care.

Households are also being supported through the \$100 Power Saving Bonus, free dental vans, free glasses, Active Kids vouchers and a range of other initiatives that help ease day-to-day pressures.

A huge shout-out to all the volunteers across Harcourt for all their contributions this year. I enjoyed being with you all at many community events, including our beloved Applefest and the 70th Anniversary of the Harcourt Bowls Club.

As the year draws to a close, I wish you and your loved ones a safe and joyful Christmas, and a bright start to the New Year.

My office is always here to support you with any state government matter — please reach out if we can assist.

Sincerely

*The Hon. Maree Edwards MP
Member for Bendigo West
Speaker — Legislative Assembly*

Dhelkaya Health named 2025 Premier's Medium Health Service of the Year

Dhelkaya Health has been awarded the prestigious Premier's Medium Health Service of the Year at the 2025 Victorian Public Healthcare Awards. This is the highest honour for a medium-sized health service in Victoria.

The Castlemaine and Maldon-based service was also named a finalist in the Excellence in Public Sector Residential Aged Care Services category for its innovative Trishaw Program, delivered in partnership with Cycling Without Age Castlemaine.

The Trishaw Program, which sees volunteer 'pilots' take aged-care residents on joyful trishaw rides through the community, was celebrated for bringing mobility, connection and joy to residents living in aged care at both the Castlemaine and Maldon campuses.

Chief Executive Officer Sue Race said the dual recognition was an extraordinary achievement for a health service.

"I'm thrilled with this win and our finalist status. They confirm what we've always known, that small towns can deliver big-

hearted, world-class healthcare," Ms Race said.

"This award recognises our strong culture of staff engagement, outstanding leadership, relentless focus on quality and safety, and improved financial performance. Dhelkaya Health consistently meets its activity targets set by the Department of Health and every service stream remains fully accredited."

"The acclaim belongs to our frontline staff, our innovative leadership team, generous volunteers, and the patients, clients and residents who trust us with their care," Ms Race said.

"We're now more determined than ever to keep raising the bar for rural and regional health."

The Victorian Public Healthcare Awards honour organisations, teams and volunteers that make a meaningful



difference in public healthcare — those driving innovation, improving patient experience and strengthening health outcomes for communities across the state.

From a Press Release



Harcourt CFA

The Unpredictability of the Weather

November may not have turned out as predicted. Regardless of what each day brings, fire restrictions are now in place and while it may be cloudy, cold and raining, the rules do not change. This means you cannot light a fire in the open air unless you have a permit or comply with certain requirements. To find out more, visit cfa.vic.gov.au and search for 'About the Fire Danger Period' or pick up a copy of the 'Can I, Can't I' brochure from the brigade.

Summer will come, and with current fuel loads and further grass growth, it is likely that we will experience fast running grass fires like those occurred in November in the northern parts of the state in open grasslands and crops. Are you ready and prepared? Do you have your fire plan?



What happened in November?

Up to the 21st of the month, things were reasonably quiet with only two turnouts. On the 3rd we were paged as part of an escalation to an alarm at the Castlemaine Hospital. This occurs when the initial responding brigades have not turned out within their standard time allowance and so other brigades are paged. Generally, before we are ready to turnout or just after turning out, a primary brigade has arrived on scene and then put a stop on us, which was the case on this occasion.

On the 8th we were paged to support Sutton Grange to attend to a grass fire on the side of the road not far from their fire station. They were able to get on scene and make it safe before our arrival so, once again, we turned around and returned to our station.

From the 21st to the 24th we had a daily series of turnouts and then a further event on the 29th. In calendar order there was our attendance to the Harcourt Pre-School in response to a strong smell of

smoke, which was the result of an electrical short in the hot water service, this was followed with the fire in a quarry on Mount Alexander of a variety of illegally dumped rubbish, which included tyres, push bikes, mattresses and furniture; hence the column of black smoke that was seen by many residents (see photos). Next was to North Castlemaine for an undefined fire where investigation by the Castlemaine brigade found an illegal burn in a residential backyard, which was quickly dealt with. We then had a report of a motorbike on fire as a result of a fuel leak at the intersection of Symes and Gaaschs roads. The fuel ignited when it came in contact with the hot exhaust and, fortunately for the owner, did not ignite the whole bike. The final event was, yet again, to the intersection of the Calder Freeway and Fogartys Gap Road for a two-vehicle accident. The tally of seven turnouts for the month is above average for us and has provided a different scenario on each occasion.

Car Exhausts Do Start Grassfires

Driving or parking on long dry grass can lead to fires. Dry grass coming into contact with a hot vehicle exhaust or catalytic converter will easily catch fire and, in a parked situation, can spread to the vehicle concerned. These fires are determined as 'reckless' fires and heavy penalties can apply. If you start it, you own it! Please take care in situations when moving off the road. This also applies to farm machinery. Hitting a rock when slashing can also start a grass fire. Check weather conditions and postpone slashing on fire risk days.

Have a Safe and Fire Free Christmas

Before putting up your Christmas decorations, ensure Christmas tree lights, cords and transformers are in good condition, and only use candles while you are present, because the last thing you want to do is burn the presents!

Tyrone Rice

Brigade Community Safety Coordinator

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Programs & Services

Stay safe in the sun: Heat health advice

As summer intensifies in central Victoria, it's important to prepare for extreme heat as well as bushfires. Heatwaves – periods of at least three days of unusually high day and night temperatures – can be deadly, especially for vulnerable people.

Older adults, babies and young children, pregnant women, people with chronic health conditions or on certain medications, and those who are socially isolated are at greater risk. As we age, the body struggles to regulate temperature, making dehydration and heat illness more likely.

Your 3-step heat safety plan:

1. Stay hydrated

Drink plenty of cool water, even without feeling thirsty. Avoid alcohol, tea, and coffee. Carers should offer small, frequent drinks to those at risk.

2. Stay cool and rest

Keep homes cool by closing blinds and windows during the day and opening them at night if cooler. Take cool showers, use damp towels, or visit local pools or air-conditioned spaces such as libraries and shopping centres. Avoid strenuous activity in the heat.

3. Check on others

Call or visit older adults, people with health issues, pregnant women, young children, and anyone living alone.

Be prepared & know the signs

Monitor forecasts, plan for power outages, and watch for heat exhaustion symptoms like dizziness, sweating, nausea, and weakness. Seek medical help if symptoms worsen.

Get involved

Volunteer opportunities

We're seeking caring volunteers to support several community programs. **Chatty Café Hosts** run a weekly drop-in cuppa and chat, helping **Get Connected** participants build confidence and social connections. **Welcomer Volunteers** accompany participants to new activities, offering encouragement and companionship. We also welcome **performers** (music, dance, theatre or circus) to bring joy and sensory stimulation to aged-care residents at our Castlemaine campus. **Patient Transport Drivers** are also needed to safely drive patients to and from medical appointments. To learn more or express interest, email ecoller@castlemainehealth.org.au

Mount Alexander's Food Relief Network receives large donations

The Mount Alexander Food Relief Network has received its first major donations of an essential item in high demand across local food pantries: toilet paper.

Two generous community groups have stepped up to support the newly established network. The Castlemaine Gives a Crap toilet paper buying group has donated nine boxes of toilet paper, while CWA Chewton has contributed a substantial supply of toilet paper and feminine hygiene products.

"These donations are a fantastic example of community spirit and collaboration," said Mayor Rosie Annear.

"Toilet paper and hygiene products might seem small, but they make a big difference to people's dignity and wellbeing. I'm so proud of the generosity shown by these local groups."

The donations from Chewton Phoenix CWA and the Castlemaine Gives a Crap buyers group boost what community pantries can provide across the shire, said Kez Jennings, Community Development Manager, Castlemaine Community House.

"Their giving reminds us of the kindness and caring spirit that is the fabric of our community."

"Castlemaine Community House is constantly blown-away and inspired by the generosity of our community, especially those groups who consciously work to share the love across diverse needs, issues and vulnerable peoples," Ms Jennings said.

The donated supplies will be stored at the Harcourt Valley Community House, which has just launched its own food bank to further strengthen local food security efforts.

"These are the first donations to the network as a whole, and they show how powerful it can be when we work together," Mayor Annear added.

"The Food Relief Network is about making sure no one falls through the cracks. It's about connection, care and practical support – and this is just the beginning."

The network was established to connect food relief services across the shire and ensure coordinated support for



Photo left to right: Karla Rawles from the Castlemaine Gives a Crap toilet-paper buying group, Ray Kelly from Shedshaker, Kez Jennings from Castlemaine Community House and Jez Forbes from Safe Space.

those in need.

Members include Maldon Community Pantry, Uniting Church Maldon, Salvation Army, Harcourt Valley Community House, Church of Christ Castlemaine, Harcourt Food Bank, Castlemaine Safe Space and Castlemaine Community House.

The network continues to welcome donations and partnerships to help meet demand and reduce gaps in food relief across the region.

For more information contact Amy Carmichael, Council Engagement Coordinator at a.carmichael@mountalexander.vic.gov.au



Harcourt Heritage Centre

A 150-Year-Old Photograph

One of the precious items in Harcourt Heritage Centre collection is a 150-year-old photograph. The original photo, by then a century old, was given to the late Hedley James by Ray Bradfield, curator of Castlemaine's Market Museum (now the Visitor Information Centre in Mostyn St, Castlemaine).

It is one of only two known photographs of work underway on the Coliban Main Channel. This massive undertaking involved earthworks and stonework to convey water from the Malmsbury Reservoir to Bendigo. The work to construct 68 kilometres of open channel were carried out from 1866 to 1877. The photograph depicts the works at about 36 kilometres along the channel from Malmsbury, and so it must date from the early to mid-1870s.

In the photograph, Joseph Brady, the designer of the Coliban scheme is shown seated on a rock, supervising the surveyors who are busy checking levels for this gravity operated system. The men at work cast no shadows – so we can deduce that the photo was taken at about midday. In the background, sixteen stonecutters are at work squaring up blocks of granite. About twenty other

workers are shown. Every man has a full beard – there were no facilities for shaving when the men were roughing it in a nearby encampment.

The workmen's camp was near the tunnel worksite at Faraday. It was described in the *Mount Alexander Mail* as "a miscellaneous medley of stores, shanties, wooden cottages, huts, tents &c."

It is likely that the granite for the aqueduct was procured from Joseph Blight's quarry on the north-west slopes of the same mountain. A horse and dray are shown in the historic photo, but no lifting gear can be seen, which suggests that the blocks of granite were moved by brute labour to form the wall around the head of the gully. I have been told that the granite outcrop – Brady's seat – can still be seen.

The hilly, granite-strewn terrain in the photo is on the south-eastern slope of Mount Alexander, described in the *Age* newspaper as "parklike, hilly and picturesque". It has been determined that the photo was taken on the downhill slopes at Whisky Gully below what was to be the Victorian Ladies Sericulture (silkworm) reserve. Whisky Gully is one of the deepest gullies on the eastern side of Mount Alexander.

The channel works were on private land outside what is now the Regional Park. The photo shows a pit-sawn and adzed post-and-rail fence along the ridge above the channel work site. Giant gum trees can be seen on the hillside, trees that must have been of a mature size when Captain James Cook sailed the *Endeavour* along the east coast of Australia in 1770. And, wouldn't you know it, a gumtree branch, heavy with gumnuts, has crashed down on the newly built post-and-rail fence!

Heritage Victoria has registered the various stone structures on the Coliban channel. The description of the works, as recorded on the Victorian Heritage Register, is "A Granite Ashlar Masonry Wall constructed of granite blocks with granite coping." The term ashlar refers to stonemasonry in which the large blocks of stone are squared and finely dressed to produce close joints and a smooth surface. It was imperative that the stonecutters achieved such a finish so that the water could not seep out between the blocks of granite.

Stephen Charman, in his book *The Coliban Main Channel: A Walking Guide*, points out that "it might be thought that there should have been two parallel 1870s ashlar granite walls rather than one as is the case here. The argument was that, as water is unlikely to flow uphill, the wall was there simply to hold the flowing water on its course."

The CH James Collection of Harcourt history forms the nucleus of the Harcourt Heritage Centre's archive of local history. There is much of interest in what might originally have been regarded as a "dry and dusty" assortment of papers and photographs. As demonstrated in this article, old photos can be brought to life with a little research.

The collection is accessible at Harcourt Heritage Centre (ANA Hall) each Wednesday from 9 am to 3 pm.

George Milford



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Harcourt Bowling Club

Pennant

Harcourt Weekend and Midweek Pennant sides have had a lacklustre season on the green so far this year. Despite a few wins here and there, they haven't been consistent, and not to the usual standard we have come to expect. However, a lot can change in the second half, and we hope they can bounce back after the Christmas break.

Charity Round

This year, Harcourt teams will be participating in the Charity round to raise funds for the Starlight Children's Foundation. On 13 and 15 December, Pennant players are encouraged to wear the purple and yellow of the Foundation. Funds for all games, as well as other moneys raised, will be donated to this worthy cause which assists sick children living with serious illness.

Ladies' Annual Triples Tournament

The Harcourt Ladies' Triples Tournament was held on Thursday 20 November on a perfect, sunny afternoon.

After playing three games of eight ends, the ladies retired to the dining



Triples 2025 winners: Kathleen, Debbie, Helen from Inglewood



Triples 2025 Runners Up: Pam, Lesley & Sandra from Castlemaine.

room to enjoy the usual sumptuous afternoon tea Harcourt is renowned for.

Winners on the day were: Ditch to Ditch: (Leads) Marg Verbeek, Kangaroo Flat; (Seconds) Libby Harris, Harcourt; (Skips) Pam Hughes, Eaglehawk.

Tournament winners were the Inglewood team of Helen Leech, Kathleen McNaught and Debbie Williams; runners-up were Pam Hunter's Castlemaine Team with Sandra Phillips and Lesley Carlin; and in third place was Marian Carter's White Hills Team with Julie Tyler and Tess Cooney.

Co-Coordinator Judi Miles acknowledged the generous sponsors of the day and noted that Di Selwood has been presenting the prizes from Property Plus for the past seven years, for which the Club and the winners are equally grateful.

Club Championships

Competition has started for the Ladies' and Men's Singles and Pairs and the 100-Up Championships and we have already seen some upsets. Results will be in the February Core.

Friday Night Meals

Members and friends continue to enjoy the fortnightly meals provided by Kayla and Ebony.

Christmas Break-up

The Bowling Club Christmas breakup will be celebrated on the evening of Saturday 13 December.

Girls on the Green

The last night of Girls on the Green for 2025 was held on 26 November. Although numbers have been down from previous times, the ladies attending have enjoyed their bowls and the social activity associated with bowling.

We hope to run Girls on the Green sometime in the New Year. Look out for the notices when the dates are set.



Anne perfecting her style.



The presentations.

Harcourt/ Campbells Creek Triples

A number of social competitions between Harcourt and Campbells Creek were held in November on Tuesday evenings. These will continue in February and March on Thursday evenings.

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Your local Landcare group is continuing to kick environmental goals. Recently planted trees alongside Barkers Creek opposite the pony club land were given a good check over at the recent working bee.

The long grasses around the new plants were cut back and the plants were checked and watered. Some, which had undergone a growth spurt, earned themselves a taller wire cover to keep away the nibbling wallabies. In addition, the new picnic table was sanded back and oiled to give it a protective coat, and a ditch around the table was filled to give 'stumble free' access. Members finished the morning with the usual sumptuous morning tea.

In the ongoing strong relationship with the Shire Council, President Terry Willis put in a budget bid for 2026/27, requesting assistance to sort out the ownership and responsibility for the Bingham's Road Flora Reserve which has been rated as highly significant for its biodiversity value. The mix of government bodies which have a say in this reserve means that it is difficult to get a consistent approach to the conservation of this precious piece of Harcourt.

The ongoing work of Plan Harcourt was also highlighted in the submission. New development is planned near the Eagles and Craigie Roads intersection. It was suggested that surveys for threatened species start now before development begins, as required in Plan Harcourt: Part 6: Key principles for managing change: Managing growth in a village setting.

"Prepare further fauna surveys of species, such as the Golden Sun Moth, Brush-tailed Phascogale, Brown Toadlet, Powerful Owl, Speckled Warbler, Brown Treecreeper and Swift Parrot, to establish whether potential future town expansion areas are habitat for these species. Flora surveys of vegetation communities such as White Box-Yellow Box- Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Derived Native Grassland, Grey Box Grassy Woodlands and Derived Native Grassland, and Creekline Grassy Woodland and Red Gum Swamp would also need to occur."

Finally, on behalf of the group, Terry recommended that a walking trail be developed from Toll Bridge at Barkers Creek on Bridge Street opposite the CFA, to the Picnic Ground opposite VMR (west) and the Pony Club (east). It was suggested that this path could eventually be extended and linked to the new development on Eagles Road.

The group will wind up its successful year with a social gathering at a member's home. Existing and prospective members are invited. Please contact:

info@harcourtvalleylandcare.org



Janine, Sonny and Kath worked on refurbishing the picnic table and on building up the base

Mount Alexander Community Pantry Network

Working together to support the Mount Alexander community to access healthy fresh food, frozen home cooked meals, pantry items, pet food and essential self-care supplies.

Castlemaine Community House

30 Templeton St, Castlemaine
• Monday – Friday, 9:00am – 3:00pm

Maldon Community Pantry

In the hall behind Holy Trinity Anglican Church, 50 High St, Maldon
• Wednesday, 9:30am – 11:30am

Castlemaine Safe Space

74 Mostyn St, Castlemaine
• Tuesday, 4:00pm – 6:30pm
• Thursday, 9:30am – 12:00 noon
• Saturday, 1:30pm – 4:00pm
Non-perishable food items available in the pantry on the verandah 24/7.

Salvation Army

47 Kennedy St, Castlemaine
• Wednesday, 9.30am – 12:00 noon
• Friday, 9.30am – 12:00 noon

Harcourt Valley Community House

The railway station, 23 Station St, Harcourt
• Wednesday, 12:30pm - 2:30pm

St Vincent De Paul Assistance Centre

257 Barker St, Castlemaine
• Monday, 12:00 noon – 3.30pm
• Friday, 12:00 noon – 3.30pm

Blakeley Road Church of Christ Community Pantry and free lunch

66 Blakeley Rd, Castlemaine
• Thursday, 11.30am – 2:00pm

Regional Community Vet Clinic Pet Food Pantry

4 Midland Highway, Castlemaine
• Pet food only
• Friday, 10:00am – 1:00pm





HVCH Hours for December and re-opening in February 2026

As we inch closer and closer to Christmas, the Harcourt Valley Community House drop-in times (Wednesdays 12:30 - 2:30 pm) will end on **Wednesday 17 December**, re-opening on the **Wednesday 4 February 2026**.

Press Play Cafe (playgroup)

Playgroup hours (10 am - 11:30 am) on Wednesdays will match HVCH days. They are finishing the year with a Christmas Party for all families and children involved in playgroup on **Wednesday 17 December**. Please RSVP to Ingrid Button (convenor of playgroup) at playgroup to assist with planning. If you can't get there beforehand (10 December), then email harcourtvalleych@gmail.com or phone Jeanette on 0438 579 987 who will pass the message along to Ingrid.

FREE Health Screening at Coolstore Cafe on Tuesday 9 December (9:30 am - 12 noon)

La Trobe University, in partnership with the Harcourt Valley Community House and the Coolstore Cafe (32 Coolstore Road, Harcourt) is offering FREE health screenings for community members undertaken by La Trobe University first year student nurses. This gives the student nurses real experience chatting to community members and honing their skills taking blood pressure, checking heart rate, blood glucose, temperature and oxygen levels and you get a free health check! No appointment is needed, just drop into the Coolstore Cafe during these hours. A private room (away from cafe guests) is available for the

health screenings.

Many thanks to Remy and the team at the Coolstore Cafe and La Trobe University for making this event possible.

Postcard Campaign - Keep Our Doors Open

Following up on last month's Core article, Harcourt Valley Community House is participating in a statewide campaign to lobby the state government for realistic funding for Community Houses INCLUDING funding for OUR unfunded Community House, here in Harcourt.

A big thank you to Harcourt, so far we have almost 200 signed postcards but we need more! You may have recently received a letter in your letterbox appealing for help by signing the detachable "post card" and taking it to one of our community partners (listed below). A stamp is NOT required as we intended to join with the folk at Castlemaine Community House and Maldon Neighbourhood Centre to present all our postcards to the Hon. Maree Edwards MP at Castlemaine Community House on Thursday 11 December. We will still gratefully receive postcards after that date and organise to post any more received directly to the Minister Ros Spence in the new year.

A HUGE thanks is extended to the Monday/Thursday Walking Group who "posted" our letter in local letter boxes of Harcourt Householders.

How to get your postcard to us.

The critical information to put on the postcard is your signature, name and address as shown on the electoral role. This is like signing a petition, just on an individual piece of paper or card. It would be a bonus if you

could fill out "Why you love your Neighbourhood House" (optional).

Our many thanks to our community partners, who have an extra supply of postcards and a special box to put them in. There is no need to place a stamp on the postcard if you "post" them locally in a collection box at.

- ▶ Harcourt Post Office, High St, Harcourt. (Please do not "post" in the red Aust. Post mailbox our special box is inside the Post Office)
- ▶ Heritage Centre (open Wednesdays) - ANA Hall, also High St, Harcourt
- ▶ Coolstore Cafe (32 Coolstore Road) open Mon- Fri from 6 am - 1 pm, and of course
- ▶ Harcourt Valley Community House (at 23 Station St, Harcourt) open Wednesdays 12:30 - 2:30 pm (but slip it under the door at any other time)!

Thank you in advance for your help to secure recurrent funding for the Harcourt Valley Community House!

Harcourt Community Pantry (HCP) - Wednesdays 3, 10, 17 December. (12:30 - 2:30 pm) then resuming on 4 February, 2026.

As previously mentioned, HCP is a member of the Mt Alexander Community Pantry Network (Mt. Alex CPN - note, previously called the Mt. Alexander Food Relief Network). Elsewhere in the Core you will find two posters from the Mt. Alex CPN, one showing all Network partners' addresses and normal hours of operation and a special poster showing where food can be obtained during the forthcoming holiday season (over Christmas & New Year especially).

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Special thanks to our Harcourt Community Pantry volunteers; Chris, Emmylou, Helen and Marie who turn up each week to meet and greet community members and work hard to organise the pantry.

Community Giving Project to support the free Castlemaine Community Christmas Lunch

The Harcourt Community Pantry is proudly supporting the Community Giving Project this year. Donations of non-perishable grocery items, toiletries and small gifts (either for adults or children) are being collected across Mt. Alexander Shire to help support the Castlemaine Community Christmas Lunch, who will provide a free lunch and also a take-away pack with groceries and gifts for anyone who can't attend the lunch. See <https://cch.org.au/community-christmas-lunch/> for more details.

Collection points for gifts or groceries in Harcourt include the Harcourt Valley Community House at 23 Station St, Harcourt (old railway

station) on Wednesday 10 or 17 December between 10 am - 2:30 pm or also at the Coolstore Cafe, 32 Coolstore Road, Harcourt during business hours Mon-Fri (6 am - 1 pm) except public holidays.

Harcourt Community Lunches in 2026

We would really like to offer community lunches in 2026. There would be a modest cost involved to cover expenses (about \$10 for a two-course meal). Our kitchen is fully registered with Mt. Alexander Shire to "cook and serve on premises". To make this happen, we need to know if there is community interest and/or volunteers willing to be involved with the cooking, set-up, serving and pack up. Please register your interest either way (participating and/or helping) by emailing harcourtvalleych@gmail.com or drop in on a Wednesday (12:30 - 2:30 pm) and we will keep you in touch with the progress of these plans.

Contact the Harcourt Valley

Community House

Visit us: 23 Station Street Harcourt Vic 3453 (Wednesdays during school terms, 12:30 pm–2:30 pm)

Email: harcourtvalleych@gmail.com

Phone: 4417 8742 (Please leave a message as this phone is monitored regularly)

Phone Jeanette: 0438 579 987

Reminder: 10c bottles and cans this festive season

Please remember to dispose your eligible 10c bottles and cans at the HVCH bins over the festive season. They will be checked and emptied regularly. This important fundraiser is vital to keep HVCH going.

Wishing Everyone a Joyous Festive Season and a Happy and Safe New Year, see you in 2026!

Cheers

Jeanette

Voluntary Manager

Office Space and Room Hire Available

A multipurpose room, offering heating, cooling and wifi can accommodate up to 40 people (seated in rows) or about 30 seated at tables. If you need to hire this space for meetings, events or workshops, please let us know. A fully equipped kitchen is also available.

Rates are \$12/hour (community organisations or not-for-profit) or \$20/hour for business or private use. Half or full day rates offer significant savings over the hourly rate. Call or email us to book a time for a tour of the facility or to discuss your needs.

Do you need a comfortable, secure office space on a casual, temporary or semi-permanent basis? We are offering

co-share office space @ \$5/ hour casual rate but we can negotiate half day, daily, weekly or monthly rates based on your needs. We can also offer independent (security coded) access to the building and desk space, heating, cooling, wi-fi, kitchen amenities and ample car parking space. Call or email Jeanette or Emmylou to discuss your needs or book a tour of the facility.

Printing & IT Services at HVCH

We are now offering printing, scanning and email services at HVCH during our regular opening hours (Wednesdays 10 am–12 noon).

Printing Fees

A4 black & white @ 10c per page, colour @ 20c per page

A3 black & white @ 30c per page, colour @ 60c per page

Lamination

Lamination of your documents is also available, an extra 20c for A4 or 50c for A3 sized documents.

Scanning and Email

Do you need to scan and email a document? Cost is 10c per page or we can negotiate a price for a large (multi-page) document.

Public Access to Computers

Two public access computers are available at HVCH. Do you need to access your email? Do some research? This is available for free during opening hours (Wednesdays 10 am–12 noon). A donation is welcome.

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Five years of Rainbow Steps

In news that will warm even the crankiest Spring magpie... the Rainbow Steps Walking Group this December becomes five years old.

What began in 2020 as a small experiment in "what if LGBTQIA+ people & allies simply wandered around the Botanic Gardens together every Tuesday" has now become a fully-fledged social institution.



Over 100 different walkers have participated in this weekly meander as well as so many dogs that the census will never successfully capture them. The success of this group inspired spin offs in Daylesford and Kyneton and ventured to do an excursion to show them how it was done. Closer to home was another memorable incursion with the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens Lead Gardener Tina Thanos, who revealed top secret tree lore.

Speed and competitiveness are never involved but for some a coffee after the walk is now a non-negotiable. It is here that many of the deepened friendships have grown, brewed and solidified.

Participant Sue summed it best: "It is such a casual and natural way to connect with others of like mind and to find out what's going on... and the dogs set the pace."

Volunteer Cathy – heroic, consistent, benevolent weather alchemist – has led this group solo for more than 2.5 years and Ange now joins her, making the next 5 years of Rainbow Steps Walking Group look promising.

If this group might be of interest to you or you'd like to come and join us for a lap of the gardens again, please come along or send an email to lgbtqiqa+@castlemainehealth.org.au for more information.

Thompson House welcomes residents back home



Thompson House residents Ramon (left) and John (right) chatting by the fire.

Dhelkaya Health is delighted to welcome residents back to Thompson House, following the completion of a major transformation that has turned the residential aged care facility into a light-filled, contemporary and truly homelike space.

Nestled within the extensive gardens of the Castlemaine campus, Thompson House now offers a beautifully considered environment that supports older people to age in place - comfortably, safely and with dignity.

The renovated 43-bed residence has been thoughtfully redesigned with natural tones, gentle lighting, and elegant finishes that create a sense of calm and ease. A graceful new entrance greets residents and visitors, while connected corridors help guide people through the building with confidence and comfort.

"Our aim was to create a place that truly feels like home," said Raquel Knights, Director of Nursing, Aged Care. "Thompson House is now a warm, welcoming and inclusive space where older people can live well regardless of their stage of ageing or care needs."

During the renovation period, residents temporarily relocated to Ellery House, where they continued to receive personalised, high-quality care. Their return to Thompson House has been met with heartfelt joy and excitement as they settle back into modern, spacious rooms with ensuites, a variety of communal lounges and activity areas, and peaceful garden views.

While Thompson House continues to provide dementia-friendly care, it is by no means only a facility for those living with dementia. It is a vibrant and inclusive home for older people across the Mount Alexander Shire, a place where individuals are supported to remain independent, form new friendships and stay connected to the wider community.

Residents benefit from 24/7 clinical care provided by a dedicated team of experienced staff, along with onsite allied health services such as physiotherapy, podiatry, dietetics and speech therapy. Visiting services including dental, audiology and hairdressing add to the ease and comfort of daily life.

A dynamic lifestyle program supports engagement, creativity and purpose, while regular visits from local schools, artists and entertainers bring intergenerational connection and joy into daily routines.

"Thompson House now reflects not only the high standard of care we've always delivered, but the warmth and vibrancy of the community we serve," Raquel added. "It's a place where people can live with dignity, joy and the comfort of knowing they truly belong."

Thompson House is now open to new residents and welcomes enquiries from families across the region. To learn more, visit our website: www.dhelkayahealth.org.au/residential-care/residences

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Weather & Water

Good rainfall in November

Rainfall for November was received over 11 days at Reservoir Road. 55.75 mm was the total – the second highest reading for the year, after June. It's no exaggeration to say that the amount of rain was very welcome.

The month began with glorious weather on the first weekend, followed by rain, and on the fourth the weather turned cold with hail. The adage that frosts don't occur in Harcourt after Cup Day was proved wrong on the sixth of November. On the tenth and eleventh of November, the cold had us lighting the wood fire again. I have recorded in my notes that I was back in full winter gear: the puffer jacket, scarf and boots. The temperatures continued to vary between pleasant and very cold mixed with small amounts of rain until the last three days when 22.5 mm was received in total.

Total rainfall for the year to the end of November was 439 mm – much lower than the total for the same time last year, which was 514.5 mm.

The summary of the Weather Bureau's forecast for summer is: "Below average rainfall is likely in the west and eastern inland, there are equal chances of above or

below average rainfall for much of the east coast and southern states and warmer than average days and nights with an increased risk of extreme heat; and an increased risk of bushfires for parts of New South Wales, Victoria (most of southern Victoria) and Western Australia.

The weather bureau's full outlook for summer can be found at: www.bom.gov.au/video/long-range-forecast-summer-december-2025-to-february-2026

Rural Irrigation allocation increased to 100%

On November 15 Coliban Water issued a notice on their website to say that:

"Rural allocations have increased to 100% of licence volume. The increase to 100% is for the remainder of the 2025/26 rural season for all licensed rural channel and pipeline customers."

Inflows to the reservoirs improved markedly in July and August, and were maintained for September, petered off in October, and stabilised in November.

As at 4 December, the combined reservoir levels (those shown below and also Coliban's share of Lake Eppalock) were at 65%.

Robyn Miller

Grace Church

This is a statement of belief by Grace Church

That Extra Mile

Jesus famously said If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Some of my readers may have seen this dramatized in the television series "The Chosen" (also available on DVD, or you might find some episodes on YouTube). In that instance, the Roman soldiers are absolutely astounded when Jesus' disciples volunteer to carry the soldiers' kit for a second mile, after having been compelled to carry it the first mile.

Jesus practised what he preached ... when he got to the Garden of Gethsemane, he resolved to go the extra mile ...

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." ... And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping... Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." And again he came and found them sleeping So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."

Ps Roger Thurecht, Grace Church

Reservoir Levels 2025

	30 Jul	4 Sep	28 Sep	27 Oct	4 Dec
Upper Coliban	58.7%	63%	61.6%	62.3%	66%
Lauriston	70.3%	80%	88.9%	87.6%	84%
Malmsbury	14.6%	19%	28.5%	31.8% (26 Oct)	30%
Barkers Creek	33.7%	34.9% (28 Aug)	39.9%	41.5% (26 Oct)	41.5% (23 Nov)

Data sourced from the Bureau of Meteorology and Coliban Water websites.

Grace Church

Service: 11.00am Sunday

All Welcome

Pastors: Roger & Glenise Thurecht

0422 605 897

gracecastlemaine.org.au

30 Buckley Street, Harcourt

KATIE FINLAY'S FRUIT GROWING TIPS

Hi everyone

It is such a joy to be at the start of a brand-new fruit season, eating home-grown cherries, berries, strawberries, loquats, mulberries, and apricots. We're so lucky with our climate here in Harcourt (despite it never being exactly what you want!) that we can grow so much bounty in our backyards. It's a great reminder of why it's a good idea to plant lots of different fruit trees in your garden - in a good year, you get an amazing choice of fruit and, in a bad year (which seems to happen often), you still get something!

We'd like to give a huge call out to our wonderful Fruit Crew volunteers at the Orchard Keepers orchard here on our farm. Their dedication and enthusiasm make it possible for us to bring fresh, local and delicious organic fruit to our community every week. You can find the Orchard Keepers stall at the Castlemaine Farmers Market every Wednesday afternoon at the Camp Reserve from 2-5 pm. We couldn't do it without them - their support helps us to keep one of Harcourt's oldest family orchards alive and thriving.

This is the third year we've run the Fruit Crew program, and we were delighted to have 40 people signed up this year, including lots of returning vollies from last year. Volunteers get daily fruit-growing lessons and plenty of fruit in exchange for their hard work and enthusiasm. But honestly, the main benefit for all of us is the wonderful sense of community, chats, and plenty of delicious cake. Huge thanks to Liesl from Goodness Flour for her fabulous cake premixes - we depend on them to keep the crew well fed and happy! It's a small program, but very full of heart and joy.

We'd also like to thank The Core for giving us the chance to have a chat with you all each month. We love talking about fruit trees and helping people feel more confident with them. Our aim is to make abundant, home-grown organic fruit a reality for all, so it's been a delight to help many more people with their fruit trees this year. Because there's no Core edition in January we're loading you up with lots of tips this month!

1. Curly leaves. If you're noticing curly leaves on your trees have a look inside the leaves to see whether you can spot aphids. They are the main culprit for curly leaves on fruit trees (except for peaches and nectarines, when it's often caused by a fungal disease called Leaf Curl). If there are aphids on your trees see if you can also spot any ants. The ants protect the aphids, and even move them from place to place. The first step to getting rid of aphids is to exclude

the ants from the tree if possible. A sticky barrier around the trunk will often do the trick.

2. Slugs on leaves. Keep an eye on your cherry and pear trees for the dreaded Pear and Cherry slugs. It's easy to spot them because they leave calling cards of bare patches on the leaves they've eaten. Luckily, they don't damage the fruit, but they can give the trees a hard time by eating all the leaves. As soon as you notice any on your trees, squash them by folding the leaf over (but don't pull the leaves off). It's quite easy to get rid of them on a small tree as long as you squash them every few days. On a bigger tree, you might need to dust the tree with wood ash a few times to help beat the slugs. As a last resort, you can use Eco-Neem to spray them.

3. Spotty fruit. Another thing you may be noticing on your trees is various kinds of spots on your fruit. There's lots of freckle on the apricots this year, a bit of brown rot is showing up in the stone fruit, and lots of apples and pears have black spot. If your fruit is spotty don't panic, there's still something you can do to stop things getting worse. Though the main danger period for infection has passed, your fruit trees are still vulnerable to disease spreading at this time of year if it rains. Visit them regularly so you notice any problems that appear and aim to keep a "cover spray" of wettable sulphur on your trees before any forecast rain.

4. Feed your trees. Did you know that all these pests and diseases are more attracted to unhealthy trees? No matter what problem your fruit tree is experiencing, the first and best solution is always to work on creating healthy soil. Adding really good, home-made compost or worm castings is a great thing to do at the start of summer - or any time!

5. Fruit Fly. You should definitely have at least one fruit fly monitoring trap out in your garden by now. The best type at this time of year is one that attracts male fruit flies, e.g. the Biotrap. It contains a male pheromone that is specific to Queensland Fruit Flies, so there's a bigger chance that anything you catch in the trap will be a QFF. You can buy new traps, or re-use last year's traps and just buy new inserts and lures for them (you can get them from Mt Alexander Timber and Hardware in Campbells Creek). You can also make your own traps, but they're not nearly as good. The bait tends to go off really quickly and

needs replacing, and they also attract lots of different types of insects, which make it much harder to know for sure whether you've actually caught a fruit fly, as they can be tricky to identify. If you do think you've caught a QFF, try to get a positive ID. Try visiting Council's fruit fly page: <https://www.mountalexander.vic.gov.au/My-Property/Pets-and-animals/Wildlife-and-pests/Pests/Fruit-fly>. If you need a fruit fly refresher download a free Fruit Fly Resource Pack from our website: <https://growgreatfruit.com/product-category/free-stuff/>.

6. Netting. If you're planning to net your fruit trees, then the sooner the better, or you risk losing your fruit! As soon as you've finished fruit thinning the nets can go on. Surprisingly, white bird nets can help provide some protection against fruit fly even if the holes are big enough to let flies through. However, this is not foolproof, so if you can afford it, use nets with holes small enough to keep out the fruit flies. Fruit fly is a whole-of-community issue, so everyone can help to prevent it. If you've got fruit trees you can't look after, it's best to remove them. The most important thing we can all do (and luckily also the easiest) is don't bring fruit to Harcourt from other areas, particularly places like Bendigo or Maldon where fruit fly is more established. If you can't stop well-meaning friends from bringing you fruit or veggies from their garden, check it carefully, and if there's ANY doubt about whether it might have larvae in it, don't dispose of whole fruit that you don't eat, or scraps, in the compost or the rubbish. It's really important to make sure any larvae have been killed before the fruit is disposed of. Microwaving it, or putting it in a black garbage bag in the sun for a few days will do the trick.

So many pests and diseases to watch out for at this time of year!

Happy holiday season everyone, and we hope you'll be enjoying some delicious, organic, home-grown fruit for Christmas.

Hugh and Katie Finlay are certified organic orchardists and offer Grow Great Fruit organic home fruit growing courses. They're also founding members of the Harcourt Organic Farming Co-op. Head to growgreatfruit.com to sign up for their free Weekly Fruit Tips newsletter, and register for one of their free online workshops.

Council news

Textiles and soft plastics recycling trial

We're trialling a new textiles and soft plastics recycling service in Castlemaine.

For the next six months, residents can drop off household quantities for free at the Castlemaine Transfer Station.

The goal of the trial is to gauge the level of community uptake and the costs involved. The outcome will determine whether fees will be required or whether we can absorb the costs and subsidise the service.

Find out what you can and can't recycle at mountalexander.vic.gov.au/Recycling-and-composting.

Join us at Christmas Lunch

Community Christmas Lunch is a free event held at the Castlemaine Town Hall on Christmas Day, Thursday 25 December.

Celebrate the day with lunch and dessert, music, activities, presents and good company.

Register at cch.org.au or call 5472 4842.

Fire Danger Period

Fire danger period will run from Monday 17 November 2025 to Friday 1 May 2026.

This means you cannot light a fire in the open air unless you have a permit or comply with certain requirements.

Learn more about fire restrictions at cfa.vic.gov.au.

Working together for a healthy, connected shire
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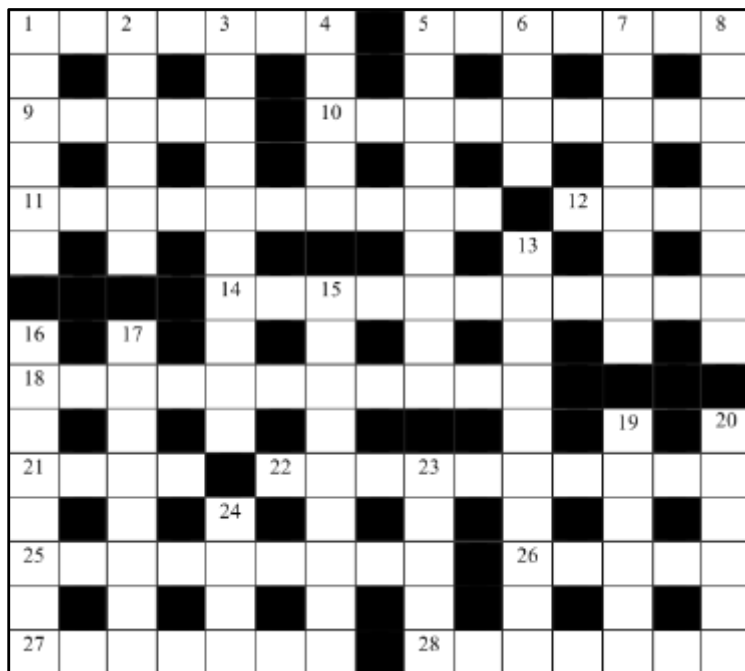
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December 2025 Xword © McW December '19



Down:

1. A godfather of a roofline... (6)
2. Large coal-shovel or car bulkhead does a 19 to give internal stiffener to fish. (6)
3. Proclaim the biologically improbable. (10)
4. Who would have thought that the anagrammatical mood of a verb would have ought to do with *hors d'oeuvres*?! (5)
5. The owner of democracy? (9) [*Sorry, not cryptic.*]
6. Scrooge's bearing?. (4)
7. Poetic cephalopod? (8)
8. Avoid dance move? (4-4)
13. You'd get to wear a crappy halo if you wrote *those* sort of books! (10)
15. Do up and shuffle off, you hippie fashionista! (3-3-3)
16. Tautological visual tour? (5-3)
17. D. H. Grasshopper? (8)
19. Drop south a fair way from the gulags. (6)
20. 24, 26, 9—you work it out! (6)
23. After double back-flip, tamed Shakespearian character desperately needs salt. (5)
24. She looks the same while looping the loop. (4)

Across:

1. Way to move forward without marketing gets us a tank after writer. (7)
5. So...o... pump up the ceremony, you adjectival ass! (7)
9. Mount 26 to record Bach's air in the mirror. (3,2)
10. One could tell a rude tale about how a poet was set up... (9)
11. He picked out the neater idol. (10)
12. By definition, not possible in doubles? (4)
14. Is not her rose pre-pressed? How she would place it at intervals through the book... (11)
18. So fashionable! So real!! So tinny!!! (11)
21. Hear hello, see above. (4)
22. Unspeakable American, but watching the sunset the lady's not for turning... (10)
25. Who would dare sneer at Romeo? (9)
26. Long before Black Power, 20 had things to say about it. (5)
27. Online ballot with approximation in the middle to call up feelings, etc. (7)
28. Save the front page! I have everything in this portmanteau. (4-3)

November Xword Solution © McW December '19



Down:

1. They *claim* it gently strips fruit.
2. Why would anyone describe this condiment as "dull Jerry nectar"?
3. Perfect soakers as in dream...
4. Unread news won't generate a reply!
5. Mum's little fight for big dog [*Mastiff*] is no longer hers: doggone—just a spat!
6. Greedy lizard? [*Gordon...*]
7. Paper burns at Fahrenheit 451, but add 13 to get a real bang! [*Well? TNT...*]
8. Lousy tune clings on thinly...
13. Receding so far into the gloom, he was still spotted for what he was.
14. If fat diva wants to testify, guess what?
16. New 11? [*Well?*]
21. Get rid of small rule [*en-*] and solve grave puzzle.
23. Are sea-horses always girls? [*Weston-super-mare... etc.*]
24. You really think I'm dumb? It's only little pieces that we'll find in the middle of all this.

Note: 11 & 16 lack definitions, but give descriptive nouns as solutions.

Across:

1. Of utmost importance to get the usual sum!
6. Receive [*get*], and the preposition where you harass me?
9. Arithmetic serpent? [*Well?*]
10. No-no at sign of up-oneself-ness [*affectation?*] leaves real friendliness...
11. Self-satisfied Scots dam? [*Well?*]
12. Mussolini-sounding fish out of Ernest [*Hemingway*] [*It's a boon*] for some.
14. Cut short a way across.
15. Plural of first 3 of 27, then 5, 6, 6, 14, 17, 19, 18... [*Well? Tedious...*]
17. Legendary bird sounds solid even if it wasn't. [*Well?*]
18. Impost [*fine*] at twenty-five past to recover from a gaffe? (Maybe with cards...)
19. To vote for the Iron Horse [*Rly*] is to come out publicly...
20. Spurn, if started with first rat's offer [=reject], but with *this* first, depress...
22. Runaway might use methanol... [*Well?*]
25. Key rivals in "God-of-war" game?
26. Could re-spell the Bulbul? [*Well?*]
27. Attempt [*try*] the beatified to keep assignment?
28. Avoids crab-wise dance moves.

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Castlemaine Bus Lines

Harcourt Services Monday to Friday

	am	pm	pm
Market St/Harmony Way (Harcourt)	8:55	12:05	2:25
Coolstore Road/Midland Hwy (Harcourt)	8:56	12:06	2:26
Coolstore Road/Midland Hwy (Harcourt)	8:57	12:07	2:27
Blackjack Rd/Midland Hwy (Harcourt)	9:03	12:13	2:33
Halford St/Barker St (Castlemaine)	9:05	12:15	2:35

From Castlemaine to Harcourt Monday to Friday

Castlemaine RSL/Mostyn St (Castlemaine)	8:45	11:55	2:15
Wimble St/Barker St (Castlemaine)	8:48	11:56	2:18
Blackjack Rd/Midland Hwy (Harcourt)	8:53	12:03	2:23
Coolstore Rd/Midland Hwy (Harcourt)	8:54	12:04	2:24
Market St/Harmony Way (Harcourt)	8:55	12:05	2:25

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November Solution

2	3	5	7	6	1	9	4	8
1	9	7	4	2	8	3	5	6
4	6	8	3	9	5	7	1	2
7	4	6	5	8	3	1	2	9
5	1	2	6	7	9	4	8	3
9	8	3	2	1	4	5	6	7
8	5	9	1	3	6	2	7	4
3	2	1	8	4	7	6	9	5
6	7	4	9	5	2	8	3	1

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Easy

Fill the grid so every row, column and 3x3 frame contains every number from 1 to 9.

For early access to the solution to this month's puzzles, email: news@harcourt.vic.au

9							1	7
5				7		4		
							9	
		1				2		4
				2	5	1		
7			6		4			
		7				5		2
3	4		9					8



HPA Christmas Carols in the Park

Harcourt Adventure Playground
Sunday 14 December
4:30–7 PM

Craft table for children
Free sausages & popcorn from 4.30PM

Cold Drinks \$2.00

BYO Picnic

Visit from Santa

Thompson's Foundry Band
with carols from 5:30

Crowning of the 2026
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