

# Talking Business

December 2021

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## Paul's Corner

With December upon us once again we welcome Cr Jim Memeti as the Mayor of the City of Greater Dandenong for the fifth time. Mayor Memeti maintains a passion for business in Greater Dandenong and will be supported by Cr Eden Foster who has been elected as Deputy Mayor for the next 12 months.

A huge thank you from all of us here at Council to our resilient business community. We cannot do what we do without you. We are incredibly grateful. Despite the challenges you faced managing the pandemic, many of you reached out unselfishly to others, raising money, donating food and other essential items, answering the call for PPE and much more. Indeed, we were delighted and proud to share a number of your stories in Talking Business this year.

In this edition we revisit Council's Business Recovery Grants Program and hear from another three successful recipients to see how the funding supported their business and their thoughts on the year ahead. You can read their stories on page 9. We also share the success of the Ignite Greater Dandenong Program and hear from one of the participants on how the program helped him explore his idea of turning his hobby into a business. Read his story on page 5.

Christmas is around the corner, and we are all excited to see our friends and family. As we emerge from lockdown, may I remind you to shop local and support our business community when visiting your loved ones. There is no better time than now to visit your local retailers to see the wonderful offers they have in store for their customers. Read our story on page 3 on shopping local and enjoying outdoor dining in Greater Dandenong.

On behalf of Greater Dandenong Business, I would like to wish our business community and their families a very Merry Christmas and a safe and happy New Year. We look forward to seeing you again next year.

**Paul Kearsley**  
**Director Business, Engineering**  
**and Major Projects**

## FEATURES



### Ignite Program produces positive results



### Noble Park revitalisation



### Business Grants Program



## Introducing our new Mayor

Dandenong Ward Councillor Jim Memeti has been elected Mayor of the City of Greater Dandenong for the fifth time, having previously served in the role in 2010, 2014, 2017 and 2020.

Mayor Memeti will be supported by Cr Eden Foster who has been elected as Deputy Mayor for the next 12 months.

Although COVID has significantly impacted our great city, the Mayor said there are exciting times ahead.

"I am committed to working with my fellow Councillors to achieve our community's vision for Greater Dandenong and the objectives of our Council Plan.

"We will focus on reactivating our great municipality as we all transition to a new COVID normal. Soon we will again host vibrant community events and festivals so we can celebrate our cultural diversity and provide opportunities for social connection and understanding.

"We look forward to working with our local businesses to continue the rejuvenation of our great city," said the Mayor.

The Mayor and Councillors wish you a safe and joyous festive season, and the very best for the new year.



Newly elected Mayor Jim Memeti and Deputy Mayor Eden Foster.

**Cover:** Christmas Tree at Noble Park site

Information was correct at time of publishing. Please check our website for up to date information.





# Shop local and enjoy outdoor dining this summer



If people are the soul of any great local community, then small businesses are the heart.

Our small businesses have always made a difference in the City of Greater Dandenong by creating jobs, generating business for local suppliers, and providing donations to beloved charities, schools, events, and sporting clubs.

These uncertain times over the last 18 months have challenged our hospitality industry and impacted our local small businesses. It's important now more than ever before to shop and dine locally to support our resilient traders and help our community continue to flourish.

With restrictions easing, you will see local restaurants and cafes taking up

the offer to create a vibrant outdoor dining space. As the delectable scents of restaurant cooking again start to fill the air throughout our municipality, you can now experience the joy of COVID safe outdoor dining across Dandenong, Noble Park and Springvale.

We look forward to welcoming you back to enjoy our wonderful city and hope to see you again soon.

## Ensure your business has a CovidSafe Plan

It is mandatory for every Victorian business with onsite operations to have a COVIDSafe Plan.

Your COVIDSafe Plan must demonstrate:

- your actions to help prevent the introduction of COVID-19 to your workplace
- the type of face mask or personal protective equipment (PPE) required for your workforce
- how you will prepare for, and respond to, a suspected or

confirmed case of COVID-19 in your workplace

- how you will meet all the requirements set out by the Victorian Government. Some industries or workplaces are subject to additional industry obligations and have additional requirements of employers and employees.

Businesses must review and update their COVIDSafe Plans regularly, especially when restrictions or public advice changes.

The State Government are also offering a free, confidential review of your COVIDSafe Plan. The review will help to ensure your plan reflects the current COVIDSafe settings. To book a review, email [covidsafeplanreview@djpr.vic.gov.au](mailto:covidsafeplanreview@djpr.vic.gov.au) with your business name, a contact name and phone number.

**For further information, templates and advice on COVIDSafe Plans visit [coronavirus.vic.gov.au/covidsafe-plan](https://coronavirus.vic.gov.au/covidsafe-plan)**

# A snapshot of our Greater Dandenong tourism sector

Tourism is not new to Greater Dandenong, but it is new to Talking Business. We now have a regular section of the magazine where we share the tourism offerings we have in our city. This will include articles on our tourism operators, what's happening in our accommodation and hospitality venues and let's not forget the adventure/ action venues across our municipality.

**If you're a local tourism operator and have a story you'd like to share, we'd love to hear from you or if you have a tourism question, send an email to our Food Enterprise and Tourism Officer, Helen Beekmans via [helen.beekmans@cgd.vic.gov.au](mailto:helen.beekmans@cgd.vic.gov.au).**

## Dandenong Bowls Club

Not the biggest, but Dandenong Club may well be the most ambitious Bowls Club in the country!

With a stated purpose to inspire more bowlers to bowl more often, the Club's business plan focuses on having fantastic facilities, high engagement with stakeholders and being competitive at every level of play.

Growth for the sport has been stimulated by the Club's vision for it to be the hub of bowls for Melbourne's south east. The Club joined the national scene by establishing teams to compete in Bowls Australia's BPL competition and a new independent competition, The Ultimate Bowls Championship.



Dandenong Club Pulse Team

In 2020-21, Dandenong Club furthered its support of the national game by extending its involvement in Bowls Australia National Programs. The Club provided facilities and event management skills to host Bowls Australia National Titles and the Australian Champion of Champions event.

Initially scheduled for 2020, COVID restrictions required the events to be deferred to 2021. They were successfully held as independently run events with the Champion of Champions occurring in March and the National Titles in May 2021. These were auspicious events which utilised the many offerings that Greater Dandenong City has to offer.

### Did you know?

1,298  
The number of trees in the Dandenong Activity Centre

2015  
The year traditional Asian Gateway on Buckingham Avenue constructed

1909  
The year Noble Park Township established

## Supporting Greater Dandenong Children's Festival

The September School Holidays saw the City of Greater Dandenong hold their 10th annual Children's Festival. The virtual event was a huge success

with families participating in fun activities and workshops online.

Council's Economic Development Unit sponsored a competition seeing two happy families win tickets for four people to attend a Food and Cultural Tour in Greater Dandenong. The Melbourne Cable Park also generously donated a family pass for

four to enjoy a day out at the water park. Congratulations to the three lucky families who won these fabulous prizes and thank you to Melbourne Cable Park for their support. Learn more about Food and Cultural Tours at [greaterdandenong.vic.gov.au/food-tours](http://greaterdandenong.vic.gov.au/food-tours) and Melbourne Cable Park at [melbournecablepark.com](http://melbournecablepark.com).





## Steps towards being a smart city

Real time data collection and analysis is helping modern cities move toward evidence-based decision making. In Greater Dandenong's three activity centres; Dandenong, Springvale and Noble Park, people counter devices\* are being deployed to gather daily footfall movement at key locations.

A smart city is a technologically modern urban area that uses different types of electronic methods and sensors to collect specific information. This technology can be as simple as a shopping centre door counter to more sophisticated collection methods using mobile phone WIFI data to understand usage types and dwell times.

Council understands that great people places are attractive to men, women and children and therefore seeks to ensure streets and places are welcoming to all. The data from the people counters provides insights into pedestrians' daily, weekly and monthly travel patterns in our activity centres. This data will be used to support grant applications, prioritise

streetscape investment and plan activities to support development of great places.


The technology also makes visible the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on people visiting activity centres. As restrictions ease and trends around movement start to normalise, the data will inform business decisions for a range of stakeholders. Quarterly people counter reports will be published on Council's website in 2022.

Parking sensors are also being rolled out in the activity centres. The technology is a more accurate and consistent way to manage parking by encouraging drivers to comply with restrictions. These parking sensors support efficient turnover of parking spaces and helps on-street parking to be more readily available for residents, businesses, shoppers and visitors to the centres.

\*People counters do not collect or record personal information and the identity of individuals is not apparent under the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014.



## Ignite Program produces positive results

 The Ignite Program was relaunched in June 2021 and successfully helped 15 local entrepreneurs start their businesses.

Ignite participants came along with great initiatives and ambitions for their businesses. The program created a supportive environment for participants to connect, share and communicate.

Jeff Crosbie, the founder of Crosby & Marr Music Performance said "the program was a perfect opportunity for me to really focus on my business idea and to explore if I could turn my hobby (playing Irish music) into a viable business".

As an active Ignite participant Jeff found the weekly workshops provided valuable ideas and suggestions. He shared the importance of focusing on the 'Why' for his business was eye-opening for him.

"The program facilitators and mentors, Marcus Barber and Nicolas Bolto, were very knowledgeable. The guest speakers were also inspiring as they reflected on their own start-up journeys and offered Ignite participants tips and advice" said Mr Crosbie.

Jeff said he thoroughly enjoyed his time participating in the Ignite Program 2021 and would highly recommend the Ignite Program to aspiring entrepreneurs!

Sign up to Council's Talking Business e-newsletter for future opportunities to participate in the Ignite Program.

**Learn more: [greaterdandenong.vic.gov.au/talking-business](https://greaterdandenong.vic.gov.au/talking-business)**

# Be part of the solution and help reduce plastic waste



Pollution from single use plastics (SUPs) isn't just something that we see in coastal towns. In Greater Dandenong, SUP waste is making its way into our local streets and creeks and onwards to Port Phillip Bay. Due to their lightweight and disposable nature, SUPs are easily blown out of bins or washed away by wind or rain and end up littering our streets and waterways. This litter can break down into microplastics, with scientists increasingly finding these in our creeks, rivers and oceans and in the food we eat.

Non-essential SUPs such as coffee cups, straws, carry bags, cutlery and containers no longer have a place in our everyday lives. February 2023 will see a state-wide ban on specific SUPs, led by the Victorian Government, and Greater Dandenong City Council are encouraging everyone to avoid or reduce SUPs in preparation.

## How you and your business can help

Businesses play a vital role in plastic reduction and can influence the habits of customers and suppliers whilst reaping the benefits of reduced waste and associated removal costs, and meeting customers changing demands.



## Quick wins

- Undertake an audit to identify plastic products used by your company only once. Items used in the largest quantities should be tackled first by identifying suitable alternatives
- Foster the BYO culture amongst your staff and customers by encouraging them to bring their own cups, drink bottles, containers and cutlery into the workplace.

## Long-term changes

- Introduce ongoing staff engagement campaigns to increase awareness and break down potential barriers

- Work with your suppliers to source SUP-free solutions, from raw materials to packaging.

Council has introduced a Plastic Use Policy which applies to Council operations and all groups using Council-owned land or buildings. For further details visit: [greaterdandenong.vic.gov.au/sustainability/sustainability-and-waste](http://greaterdandenong.vic.gov.au/sustainability/sustainability-and-waste).

**Learn more: [sustainability.vic.gov.au/recycling-and-reducing-waste](http://sustainability.vic.gov.au/recycling-and-reducing-waste)**

**Have a great tip that has worked in your business and keen to share with others? Drop us a line at [business@cgd.vic.gov.au](mailto:business@cgd.vic.gov.au)**

## Springvale Boulevard project

The Springvale Boulevard will be an iconic gateway to Sensational Springvale and transform Springvale Road into a signature boulevard, reinforcing the Springvale Activity Centre as one of Melbourne's leading cultural destinations. Council looks forward to seeing a significantly improved shopping and visitation experience with new opportunities created for outdoor dining to stimulate business activity.

Construction works are well underway along Springvale Road between Balmoral Avenue and Windsor Avenue. Recent works have included:

- temporary site compound in Warwick Avenue carpark and a site office located on the corner of Lightwood Road and Springvale Road
- temporary works – lighting, relocated pedestrian crossing, traffic barriers
- removal of centre median, barriers and trees to make way for the new, improved street. This street will have more than 40 new trees. Together with the new garden beds,

this will create a beautiful place for people to shop, connect and linger

- underground works – relocated utility services, drainage improvements, new electrical infrastructure.

**Learn more: [greaterdandenong.vic.gov.au/springvale-boulevard](http://greaterdandenong.vic.gov.au/springvale-boulevard)**





# Small Business Energy Saver Program



Did you know that as a small business you can reduce your running costs and greenhouse gas emissions through the Small Business Energy Saver Program?

South East Councils Climate Change Alliance (SECCCA) will be providing expert advice on the Small Business Energy Saver Program to small businesses. The program is set to end in May/June 2022, so apply now to take advantage of these discounts.

When upgrading to more energy-efficient equipment, the program provides small businesses with significant discounts off energy efficient equipment and installation costs. Participating in the program may help some small businesses recover from COVID-19, by cutting costs.

Eligible businesses can use the grant to replace inefficient electric hot water and gas systems, upgrade to efficient room reverse cycle air-conditioners and install energy-efficient fridges, freezers, and refrigerator display cabinets.

In addition to a potential saving of up to 85 per cent of the upfront costs (via the rebate system) other benefits include long-term reduction in energy costs, improving your business' energy consumption and potentially connecting with local traders and installers within Greater Dandenong.

For further advice on the program or to determine your eligibility contact [sbesprogram@seccca.org.au](mailto:sbesprogram@seccca.org.au).

**Learn more: [seccca.org.au](http://seccca.org.au)**



Are you part of the 3,500? Renewed support for Social Enterprise Sector



The Victorian social enterprise sector is recognised as the largest and most dynamic in Australia. There are currently more than 3,500 social enterprises trading across Victoria, employing an estimated 60,000 people and contributing more than \$5.2 billion to the economy each year.

The Victorian Government has launched the new *Social Enterprise Strategy 2021-2025* which will see Victorian social enterprises and the people they support benefit from a renewed focus on sustainability growing the sector.

The strategy will help social enterprise create greater opportunity and inclusion for Victorians and has been developed after extensive consultation with the sector and the wider community.

The key focuses of the strategy will be building the skills and capabilities of businesses, increasing access to appropriate financing and strengthening connections between social enterprises across Victoria.

The City of Greater Dandenong is committed to supporting social enterprises.

**Are you a local Social Enterprise? We would love to hear from you! Drop us a line and tell us a bit about who you are and what you do at [business@cgd.vic.gov.au](mailto:business@cgd.vic.gov.au).**

**Learn more: [djpr.vic.gov.au/about-us/overview/strategies-and-initiatives/social-enterprise](http://djpr.vic.gov.au/about-us/overview/strategies-and-initiatives/social-enterprise)**

## Tips for small businesses from the ATO

There are simple things you can do to help your small business to stay on track. Good business habits such as using digital tools, reaching out for support, and keeping good records are three things to help you manage your

business. These habits can help improve your cash flow and give you a clearer picture of your business's viability; giving you more time to spend on your core business.

**Learn more at [ato.gov.au/sbhabits](http://ato.gov.au/sbhabits)**

## Community meals for Greater Dandenong

Sandown Greyhounds' partnership with local charities Reaching Out Because We Can and Servants of the Two Hearts have proudly donated over 10,000 meals to the local community.

The relationship between the charity groups and Sandown Greyhounds began during the second lockdown of 2020. Rather than disposing of stored food, the club reached out to the City of Greater Dandenong and were directed to the two charities who help distribute meals and other items to members of the community in need.

"We are so privileged to be partnered with Sandown Greyhounds. Thousands of meals are cooked by them that we personally deliver to our friends out there – we call them our friends because to us, they are," said Elisa Mineo of Reaching Out Because We Can.

The charities' outreach program covers Springvale, Noble Park and Dandenong, providing community lunches, dinners, delivery of food parcels, toiletries, clothing, blankets, filling homes with furniture, white goods and much more.

The groups are planning a fundraising event in the coming months to raise money for their program. Sandown Greyhounds has donated the venue for the event and anyone who is interested in supporting the fundraiser can contact Yvette Oudman at [youdman@grv.org.au](mailto:youdman@grv.org.au).



# Merry Christmas!



It's that time of year again and we are welcoming Christmas to Greater

Dandenong. Bright, giant Christmas decorations will ordain our City, while a neon lightshow literally lights up Springvale's Multicultural Place. This year's Christmas decorations serve as much-needed moments of joy - enticing shoppers and the community to our activity centres.

A festive mural covers the steps leading to Dandenong's Harmony Square, where visitors will be greeted by the much-loved giant Santa and Reindeer, along with Reindeer and Tree opposite Dandenong Market and the Waterloo Star in Langhorne Place.

Giant Christmas trees also stand proud in the public space at Noble Park Railway Station, in Multicultural Place and at Springvale Community Hub.

These large decorations are complemented by smaller, life size decorations lining streets and

pedestrian zones, including themed tree and pole surrounds, decorated public seating including Holly and Present displays in Palm Plaza's flower beds. These human scale decorations make ideal Instagram moments and add colour and vibrancy to our main shopping districts. We hope they brighten up our business community's morning, as shop and business owners open their doors for a day's trading.

With roving performers in the week leading up to Christmas, there's lots for children, shoppers and traders to enjoy this festive season.

Why not consider getting into the spirit of things and having your own Instagram competition involving decorations at your business? What other ideas might you have to take advantage of this opportunity? We'd love to hear from you! Share your story at [business@cgd.vic.gov.au](mailto:business@cgd.vic.gov.au).

## The importance of COVID-19 vaccination

The Victorian Government strongly encourages all workers to get vaccinated against COVID-19, to protect themselves, their colleagues and the community. As it is quickly becoming evident, vaccinations are becoming mandatory in many industry sectors.

As employers, you should seek legal advice if you're considering making COVID-19 vaccinations mandatory in the workplace. There is an obligation to consult with your workforce on health and safety matters and discussing mandatory vaccinations within your individual workplace, is strongly recommended.

As employees, if you have concerns about your health and being vaccinated against COVID-19, speak with your Doctor or Pharmacist.

**Learn more:** [coronavirus.vic.gov.au/vaccine](https://coronavirus.vic.gov.au/vaccine)



# Business Grants Program

## - recipients share their stories



The Business Grants Program during 2020 aimed to provide immediate financial assistance to eligible Greater Dandenong small to medium-sized businesses affected by COVID-19.

Council ran two rounds of applications which saw a combined total of over 360 successful applicants. This equalled an investment of over \$600,000.

Read below a few stories of some of our successful applicants.



### **Pamir Restaurant** 195 Lonsdale St, Dandenong

Known for their signature dish 'Mantu' – traditional dumplings, Pamir Restaurant, like many hospitality businesses have struggled through the pandemic.

Shahina Ahad, owner of Pamir Restaurant heard about the business grants on the City of Greater Dandenong Facebook page. Shahina called the Economic Development Unit at Council to confirm the details of the grant and decided to submit an application.

"I applied for the small business grant and explained what our businesses needed... after 10 business days we were told that we were successful in getting the grant."

The funding helped Pamir Restaurant to undertake much-needed renovations to their two kitchens including their kebab room, which were undertaken after restrictions were lifted.

Looking forward, Shahina is hoping for a more prosperous 2022, with lockdowns being a thing of the past. "I'm excited to re-open the doors and welcome back my loyal customers to dine in our restaurant and I'm also looking forward to seeing some new faces too".

**Learn more:** [pamirrestaurant.com.au](http://pamirrestaurant.com.au)

### **Melbourne Ballet School** 10 Summit Rd, Noble Park North

Like many, Michelle Johnson, Director of Melbourne Ballet School was faced with new challenges when the pandemic struck in early 2020. Being forced to close the doors to her dance studio took a huge toll on her small business.

Michelle submitted her grant application and was successful in securing funding. The grant enabled her to convert the ballet studio to run in person and online classes simultaneously. She purchased a large screen television, and a high-quality camera and headset to broadcast live classes to students at home. "Having the large TV in the studio meant the teacher could see the dancers from further away in the room. It has given the studio flexibility to continue to offer student classes whilst they cannot be at the studio," said Ms Johnson. Strategically, Ms Johnson understands that "there will continue to be dancers that may occasionally need to be at home isolating, so we will be able to keep using the equipment we purchased to offer them classes from home".

Looking ahead, Ms Johnson is enthusiastic about "little to no lockdowns so our dancers can have some consistency in their training and performance opportunities". The ballet school are also planning their next overseas dance adventure where the dancers train for performances and competitions in other countries.

**Learn more:**  
[melbourneballetschool.com.au](http://melbourneballetschool.com.au)



### **Bojak Brewing** 5 Bennet St, Dandenong

After officially opening their doors in late 2018 owners of Bojak Brewing, Dale and Sue Messina would never have thought they would be required to close their doors for the majority of 2020 and 2021.

Prior to the pandemic, the brewery ran a bar and restaurant as well as distributing their products to predominately metro Melbourne stockists. When the pandemic hit and they were forced to close the bar and restaurant, they had to flip their business model to become predominately wholesale. This pushed them to branch further to encompass Regional Victoria and New South Wales stockists which has been very well received. The success of their packaged beer was how they survived.

Last year, Bojak were successful in securing funding through Greater Dandenong's Business Grants Program which helped them purchase a refrigerated shipping container and a fermenter tank. The shipping container was used to store packaged beer and the additional fermenter enabled them to produce more beer to meet the increase in demand.

Moving forward Dale and Sue Messina are hoping that 2022 brings stability and Bojak Brewing can reopen their bar and have the place buzzing again. "We have an incredible local community who have supported us continuously and we can't wait to have them back enjoying one of our 14 Bojak beers on tap and fresh dough pizzas. After all, that's why we opened in the first place - a place for the locals to go to," said Ms Messina.

**Learn more:** [bojakebrewing.com.au](http://bojakebrewing.com.au)

# Noble Park revitalisation initiative

Noble Park continues to thrive as the suburb has received a much-needed funding boost from the State Government's Suburban Revitalisation Program.

The investment will enhance visitor attraction to the Noble Park activity centre, complement current business initiatives, and build upon the suburb's sense of community spirit and much-loved village character.

While the program expands on activity that has historically provided important multigenerational community facilities, it will also focus on improving the general amenity of the Noble Park retail precinct and on streetscape upgrades that link to sporting and recreational activity.

To date, the State Government investment has contributed to the following local projects:

- Ross Reserve All Abilities Playground
- Douglas Street Streetscape enhancement
- Ian Street Streetscape improvement project
- The Frank Street Open Space redevelopment.







Douglas Street before

*“The investment will enhance visitor attraction to the Noble Park activity centre, complement current business initiatives, and build upon the suburb’s sense of community spirit and much-loved village character.”*

## Douglas Street Streetscape Enhancement

Forming the central spine of business activity, Douglas Street is a traditional pedestrian-friendly main street shopping area and is the beating heart of Noble Park.

The Douglas Street enhancement project will provide a much-needed streetscape upgrade, including new footpath treatments, street furniture, trees, and landscaping.

The project area extends from Buckley Street (west end) to Stuart Street (east end) and will also include the signalisation of Leonard Avenue and Douglas Street. Safe road crossing and traffic management treatments will be introduced, as well as new seating to encourage social connection.

The enhancement project will improve the overall amenity of the street and reinforce the village atmosphere of the area.

## Activity Centres’ 10-Year Tree Planting Plan

The Placemaking team has developed a plan to increase tree planting in Dandenong, Springvale, and Noble Park activity centres over the next 10 years to ensure our streetscapes and public spaces maintain a healthy and sustainable tree population.

The first stage of tree planting investment began this spring as the City of Greater Dandenong has been recognised by several studies to have one of the lowest tree canopy coverage of all metropolitan municipalities.

This low tree canopy coverage contributes to the City being one of the hottest municipalities in metropolitan Melbourne, which may worsen with more extreme weather events. Activity centres have a higher ratio of hard surfaces, so these impacts will be felt more strongly in Dandenong, Springvale and Noble Park.

The anticipated loss of trees on private land also needs to be offset through new tree plantings in our streets and public spaces.



## Frank Street Open Space Redevelopment

The Frank Street open space redevelopment will provide Noble Park with a new open public space.

With funding from the Office of Suburban Development, and support from the Noble Park Revitalisation Board, the project will create a much-needed green corridor connection between Ross Reserve, Aubrey Moss Memorial Gardens and Copas Park.

The new open space will encourage visitors to the well-connected activity centre and aims to enhance the positive perception of the area. Improved design will

ensure new tree-covered areas and comfortable places to sit, rest and enjoy outdoor activities.

The project has involved a pre-design engagement process with residents, community groups, young people, traders, and neighbouring property owners. Ideas from the consultation will inform the design of the new space with construction expected to be completed by June 2022.

For more community consultation opportunities and to have your say on the design of the Frank Street new open space, please visit Council’s website: [greaterdandenong.vic.gov.au/have-your-say](http://greaterdandenong.vic.gov.au/have-your-say)

## Community Revitalisation #2 – anything is possible!

The Community Revitalisation program was initiated in 2017 and has prototyped, researched and tested a range of strategies to more sustainably connect employers and jobseekers. Leveraging everything that has been learnt over that time and with State Government support, the Community Revitalisation team is moving activities into a more ambitious, strategic phase designed to improve the entire employment landscape in the region over the next four-year funding period.

Taking a co-designed approach to system change we will be inviting you to have input to the thinking and framework that will guide the changes into the future.

As we move into 2022, watch this space!



## SEBN 2021 year in review and what's in store for 2022

Reflecting on our work over the past year, thanks to the incredible business community across the region, we have managed to deliver considerable outcomes, despite another 12 months of intermittent lockdowns.

In this year of COVID lockdowns, SEBN was able to provide a 'safe space' for network members to share their experiences, emotions and fears, both personal and work-related and how they support themselves and their workforce to strengthen mental wellbeing.

Other highlights include:

- hearing from leaders in their field including Dr Keith Suter AM, the NAB's Gerard Burg and Dr Louise Mahler
- providing a year of learning – how to deal with suppliers; create a better culture; the importance of body language and effective communications; visual management; alignment across the organisation and leadership insights
- influencing new initiatives and policies now being delivered across the state
- receiving extended funding to continue SEBN's work on the Community Revitalisation employment project. Council sees this work as critical at a time when we have significant shortages of labour. Increasing the supply of 'job ready'

applicants to meet the real needs of employers across all sectors will continue to be a key focus

- providing much-needed funds to our beneficiaries, ASRC and Keysborough Learning Centre with approximately \$43,000 from our annual Take a Swing for Charity golf day- thanks to the continued generosity of our local business community.

In 2022 SEBN will expand its work on the above and other significant issues under our theme for the year of *shifting mindsets* – essential as we transition into whatever the 'new normal' will be. We look forward to your continued participation and involvement.

Warmest wishes for the festive season, Christmas celebrations and enjoying time with family and friends. Thank you for your support during 2021 - may your Christmas be joyful and may the New Year be happy and prosperous.

Sandra G



## SEBN Women in Business

As we go to press, we are looking forward to welcoming special guest, Clare Bowditch for our November Showcasing Women event. This caps off a busy year for Women in Business, starting with our International Women's Day Breakfast celebration with Captain Mona Shindy of the Australian Navy.

In August, the popular Dr Louise Mahler demonstrated the importance of good body language - particularly during Zoom business meetings, and Fergal Coleman took us through the finer points of optimising company web

interfaces to maximise customer ease, access and repeat business, amongst other tips and tools.

A program refresh was launched mid-year with themes Of Go for Gold (Confidence), Time to Share (Connection), In the Loop (Communication) and Out of the Box (Creativity). These themes will continue in 2022 along with a variety of special events and network meetings for SEBN Women in Business. Topics or guest speaker suggestions for 2022 welcomed - please contact us by email: [SEBN@cgd.vic.gov.au](mailto:SEBN@cgd.vic.gov.au)





# A steely determination



## Steely determination and passion create the ideal business structure

Like the strong steel constructions Structural Challenge creates for its customers, Maria Mavrikos has built her business by the same principles: commitment, attention to detail and smart solutions.

As Managing Director, Ms Mavrikos founded the Dandenong South-based steel fabrication company in 2000 when she saw an opportunity for a business with a point of difference – breaking the “us against them” mentality with builders.

## From marketing to steel in her veins

“I’d worked for two other steel fabricators while studying marketing, beginning in payroll and admin, then moving onto estimation and the more technical side. By the time I was 21 years old I was managing one of these businesses,” Ms Mavrikos explains.

“I began a role with family business Melsteel and in four years, turnover increased around threefold. I had reached the peak of where I could go, so I thought I’d start a consulting business”.

The business started strongly but other fabricators were letting Ms Mavrikos down and clients wanted more of her services, so she launched Structural Challenge.

## Making the most of differences

When she was starting out, Ms Mavrikos was Victoria’s first female estimator in steel fabrication.

“I majored in sociology at university, which gave me good tools for dealing with people, and a positive workplace culture is always one of my priorities. We have a good balance of male and female staff but I’ve always recruited the best person for the job,” she says of her 60-strong workforce, which now has its first two female boilermakers.

## Business nerves of steel

Structural Challenge persevered through the challenges of the global financial crisis in 2007-08 but the COVID-19 pandemic has been the toughest for the business.

“We’re really lucky in our space to be working on projects related to essential services. Our amazing team has operated together really well and we’ve actually put more staff on – we’ve just had to work harder for it.”

Structural Challenge has contributed to some major projects in recent years, including the Monash University Green Chemical Futures building. The company’s important role of adding more steel into the project while saving money for the builder and finishing ahead of schedule, saw Structural Challenge win the Australian Steel Institute ‘Large Projects Award’.

## Giving back to the industry

Ms Mavrikos joined SEBN at a supplier’s request and says she enjoys being involved in the industry.

“I’ve been part of a number of different groups for CEOs, and SEBN has been really refreshing as we all generally experience the same challenges and the same successes. I’m always looking to improve as a businessperson.

“I also enjoy presenting at forums that give back to the community, such as programs focussed on disadvantaged people coming into employment, or women working in male-dominated industries.”

**Learn more:**  
[structuralchallenge.com.au](http://structuralchallenge.com.au)

## Golfers ..... mark your diaries now.

The 2022 Industry Take a Swing for Charity golf day is scheduled for Wednesday 23 February, once again at the prestigious Victoria Golf Club, followed by dinner and auction.



# Melbourne bus franchise delivers jobs boost for Volgren

Dandenong manufacturer, Volgren, will create 50 new jobs following the Victorian Department of Transport's decision to award Melbourne's franchise bus fleet to operator Kinetic.

Minister for Public Transport, Ben Carroll, announced that Kinetic, which already operates airport service Sky Bus in Melbourne, would take control of Melbourne's 537-strong fleet. Kinetic will introduce five Volgren battery electric buses (BEBs) into the city's network by June next year and by mid-2025 will have introduced 36 BEBs, plus more than 100 Volgren-bodied hybrid buses.

Thiago Deiro, CEO of Volgren, said the Department of Transport's decision to prioritise green transport would help reduce emissions, and that by promoting local content the Victorian Government were supporting Australian manufacturing and Victorian job creation.

"Every manufacturer strives to plan and structure their business based on long-term demand. The Metropolitan Melbourne Bus Franchise helps us

to do exactly that. Our expectation is that our direct labour resources will increase by 45 to 50 percent, or by around 50 direct new jobs."

"Over the past four decades, Volgren has become part of an extensive and thriving south-east Melbourne manufacturing ecosystem. And we plan on building on it by investing in programs to enhance apprentice- and traineeships at our Dandenong facility during the life of the contract."

Deiro said that Volgren was well-prepared for Victoria's transition to a low and zero-emission bus fleet.

"All our factories are geared-up to start building BEBs at the scale required to meet the needs as Australia's shift to zero-emission technology."

**This story was supplied by SEMMA. SEMMA is the peak industry association representing over 200 leading manufacturing companies located in south east Melbourne, Australia's most dynamic manufacturing region.**

**Learn more: [semma.com.au](http://semma.com.au)**



Thiago Deiro



In this issue of *Talking Business* we hear from the Greater Dandenong Chamber of Commerce on how they continue to support local businesses and help them stay connected.

During its 74-year history the Chamber has evolved from a small informal gathering of business owners to a loyal membership of prominent businesses, a strong networking brand and more recently the diversification of products and services.

Focused on supporting local businesses in new ways, the Chamber launched its COVID Business Recovery Program in 2020. Designed for business owners to think strategically and drive their business through what has been an extremely challenging period. Several businesses have taken advantage of the program. The consistent feedback has been "a great program, comprehensive

and tailored plan to implement for business growth".

For one local Dandenong business owner support from the Chamber led to crucial legal advice, enabling the reconfiguration of contractual details, advice on how to diversify his customer base to ensure increased income during lockdown and a plan both during and after lockdown to generate increasing revenue.

Underpinning many of the Chamber's changes has been the development of a three-year Strategic Plan that includes a broad network of stakeholder consultation and establishes our vision to connect to and advocate for the Greater

Dandenong Region as Australia's Future Business Hub.

Increasing membership value is our priority. Through information packs and templates such as human resources, social media, R&D tax breaks for businesses, contract development pitfalls, the latest grants information from multiple sources, plus free coaching for business – we are dedicated to supporting local business.

The Chamber is on the move so join us to help support the shaping of Australia's Future Business Hub.

**Learn more:**  
**[greaterdandenongchamber.com.au](http://greaterdandenongchamber.com.au)**





# THE BAZAAR

## Dandenong Market

This Christmas, Dandenong Market is asking the Greater Dandenong community to prioritise supporting small business when preparing for this long-awaited festive season. Since March 2020, the Market's 130 non-food traders have had their shops closed for more than nine months. We've all missed the vibrant Bazaar, the colourful florists and nurseries, much-loved pet stores, key cutters and natural soap merchant.

Essential food traders, who were able to operate as normal, still experienced reduced visitation due to radius restrictions limiting regular customers from visiting the City's cultural meeting place.

Fortunately, 615 days since the beginning of our first lockdown, all 200 small businesses are able to open their doors to the Market community this holiday season.

"After a really tough 18 months, we're not surprised our traders are excited to serve the community once again. There's a real buzz in the air," said Dandenong Market's General Manager, Jennifer Hibbs.

"We know from our loyal customers how much they've been missed, our

non-food traders really deserve a win this year and this is the perfect time to support them. Many of these businesses make 60% of the year's sales in the last three months of the year".

Dandenong Market is the best place to pick up the perfect gift these holidays. Why? Because you can find everything in one shop. Check out the Market's Bazaar and browse the expansive treasures and trinkets at amazing prices. Every plant parent will love a thoughtful pot and those with flower power can't go past one of the five thriving florists. With postal services backlogged and overseas orders delayed, buying in store is the best way to ensure there'll be presents under the tree ready for the big day.

Gift giving isn't the only reason to shop at Dandenong Market this Christmas. The Meat, Fish and Deli Hall is a one stop shop for Christmas day cooking. Pick up fresh seafood, pre-order the perfect roast chicken or treat the family to a traditional fruit cake from Melina's Bakery and Larder. Or, pop by one of the Market's many fresh fruit and vegetable stalls to stock up on the best tasting

seasonal produce to share with loved ones.

Visit Dandenong Market this year for all your Christmas and Boxing Day needs. Special trading days and times are Tuesday 21, Wednesday 22, Thursday 23 and Friday 24 December, 7am-4pm. The Market will be closed on Christmas Day Saturday 25 and Boxing Day Sunday 26 December.

**Learn more:**  
[dandenongmarket.com.au](http://dandenongmarket.com.au)



Photo credit - Dandenong Market

## From paper to pixels...

Did you know the Talking Business magazine is available electronically?

To swap to a digital version email  
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