



COUNTRY CHANGE

SPRING 2025

Your guide to making
a tree change to the
Riverina & Murray, NSW



Harvesting Happiness

THE SIMPLE JOYS OF COUNTRY LIFE

OUR CULTURE

|

REGIONAL MAP

|

MEET THE LOCALS

ON THE COVER: Skywalk Sunrise – Grant Hardwick

The Riverina & Murray

Acknowledgement of Country

Take a moment to pause and feel the earth beneath our feet. To recall our place in this timeless, bountiful country.

We acknowledge, with deep respect, the traditional custodians of this land whose stewardship continues to grace this country as it has done for more than 65,000 years.

We pay our respect to Aboriginal Elders from the past, in the present, and those who are striving today to bring their very special relationship with country to our social identity.

We endeavour to honour the full depth of history this country knows, with gratitude and care.

NEW SOUTH WALES

The Riverina & Murray are vibrant regions in south-western New South Wales, covering an area of 163,044 km².



Message from the Chair

The momentum for regional living has never been stronger. Across the Riverina and beyond, we're seeing a powerful shift – people choosing purpose, connection, and lifestyle over congestion and compromise.

In 2025, the Country Change expos are your invitation to explore this shift first-hand. These events are more than just information sessions – they're a celebration of what's possible when you choose to live and work in a place that values your time, your wellbeing, and your future.

Whether you're dreaming of wide open spaces, meaningful work, or a community that feels like home, this magazine is your starting point. Let's make the move together.



Dianna Somerville

Dianna Somerville
Chair, RDA - Riverina



Message from the CEO

Country Change isn't just a campaign – it's a movement. And in 2025, it's gaining real traction.

This year's expos will showcase the real stories, real opportunities, and real people who are shaping the future of regional Australia. From Wagga Wagga to Griffith and beyond, we're seeing families, professionals, and entrepreneurs discover that the Riverina offers more than just a tree change – it offers a life change.

As you turn these pages, I hope you'll feel inspired to take the next step. The Riverina is ready to welcome you – and we're here to help you make it happen.

Rachel Whiting

Rachel Whiting
CEO, RDA - Riverina



Lockhart Water Tower © Matt Beaver

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SWA People of the Tall Trees

The Creative Riverina

THE CREATIVE RIVERINA – WHERE ARTS,
CULTURE AND COMMUNITY MEET



WRA - Peta Dummett, Kerri Weymouth & Vickie Simpson at Survival Day exhibition 2022



ERA - Bernard Higgins (R) with Simone Jolley at 2025 NAIDOC Ball. Birdyulang Animations was a major sponsor of the 2025 NAIDOC Ball Wagga Wagga. Simone Jolley won the Birdyulang Animations Gudharraamarra Award for "Making the world shine brighter" ©Supplied by Bernard Higgins

The Riverina is a place where creativity feels like it belongs to everyone. Stitched into the stories passed from one generation to the next, painted across the walls of small-town streets, and spoken in the laughter, music and conversations that spill out of community halls and local cafes. Stretching from Bland Shire in the north to Murray River in the south, and from Griffith to the Snowy Valleys, this region is home to a network of artists, cultural organisations and creative spaces that welcome newcomers with open arms.

Here, connection happens naturally. You can arrive knowing no one and, within weeks, find yourself helping at a community workshop, visiting a pop-up exhibition, or sharing stories with a fellow artist over coffee. The Riverina offers something that city life often cannot; the time and space to create, the genuine encouragement to try something new, and the chance to see your work embraced as part of the local story.

In Barooga, Bullanginya Dreaming has been a transformative experience for both locals and visitors from across Australia. The initiative invites audiences on a journey of learning, understanding and celebrating the area's Indigenous history and rich Culture. Stories are conveyed not only through words, but also through the light, colour and movement. At its centre, the work of visual artist Rebecca Atkinson. Rebecca's designs, deeply rooted in the traditions and stories of the Bangarang People, serve as the visual heartbeat of the show. Rich with symbolism and meaning, they are woven seamlessly into the lighting, projections and sculptures, creating a powerful narrative that reflects the Bangarang Peoples' enduring connection to Country. It is the kind of experience that lingers with you long after the final curtain falls.

To the east in Wagga Wagga, artist and creative Ashleigh Pengelly is sharing Wiradjuri arts with the world through Little Black Duck. Her practice blends cultural storytelling with contemporary design, offering a fresh way for people to connect with Wiradjuri Country. "The arts community in Wagga is continually growing," Ashleigh says. "It's been fantastic to see many more opportunities being made available to regional artists." Her shopfront is a bright, welcoming space where visitors can browse her work, have a chat, and leave with a deeper understanding of the culture she represents. It is a reminder that in the Riverina, creative enterprises can flourish not only because of talent, but also because of the community that supports them.

In Coleambally, artist and therapeutic art practitioner Kerri Weymouth has established the Murrumbidgee Arts Kinship Enterprise, commonly called MAKE. A contemporary multi-disciplinary artist, Kerri is inspired by her connection with the Australian bush and regional communities. Through her practice and MAKE, she is quietly building connections that ripple out across the region. MAKE is a space for meeting, making, and sharing. Some days it is a hive of activity, with the sound of tools, brushes or sewing machines at work; other times it is quieter, filled with conversation over cups of tea as ideas are exchanged. Here, newcomers find an accessible entry point into the local creative scene. It does not matter if you have been practising your craft for decades or are starting out; there is always a place for you at the table.

Some projects reach far beyond the Riverina, while keeping their roots firmly grounded in Country. Birdyulang Animations, led by Wiradjuri creative Bernard Higgins, connects storytelling, language and cultural knowledge in ways that deepen relationships and enhance community wellbeing.



ERA – Ashleigh Pengelly at Little Black Duck
© Eastern Riverina Arts/Lightbox Imageworks



SWA By the River



WRA Darby Ingram ii
© Supplied by Darby Ingram,
on set recording Future
Ancestors Podcast

The Riverina's creative scene offers a kind of welcome that is difficult to describe. There is a generosity here – of time and knowledge.

Working alongside Elders, young people and allies, Bernard's work fosters community and connection, supporting wellbeing and helping to bridge the distances that can separate people across the region. "Our work creates spaces for healing, learning, and creative expression," he says. "It ensures Wiradyuri voices and perspectives are carried forward for future generations." Through film, animation and workshops, Birdyulang Animations is proving that creativity can be a bridge, one that connects past, present and future.

The Future Ancestors podcast, created by Wiradjuri and Pacific Islander writer Darby Ingram, takes those conversations into another space. One that reaches people wherever they are. Through thoughtful, often deeply personal interviews, Darby explores identity, Culture and the threads that connect generations. It is a space for listening as much as speaking. For many listeners outside the region, it is an introduction to the people, perspectives and stories that give the Riverina its unique character.

For those arriving from busier, more crowded places, the Riverina's creative scene offers a kind of welcome that is difficult to describe. There is a generosity here – of time and knowledge. In the city, it is easy to feel like you are one among thousands of voices;

here, your contribution is noticed and valued. You do not have to arrive with a full portfolio or a perfect plan; all you need is a willingness to take part.

Connecting can be as simple as joining a workshop, visiting a gallery, or exploring the Creative Riverina directory (creativeriverina.com), which brings together local artists, performers, makers and creative services in one place. You might find yourself at a hands-on cyanotype session, delving into printmaking, or learning the art of weaving from a local Elder. The opportunities are not only for those who create; they are equally valuable for those who watch, listen and support. Once you have settled in, you can add your own skills to the directory, sharing what you offer with communities across the region.

Our three Regional Arts Development Organisations (RADOs), Western Riverina Arts, Eastern Riverina Arts and South West Arts, are ever-present in their communities. Supporting, advocating for, and celebrating creatives in their work. They help ideas grow, connect artists and initiatives, and ensure the region's creative life is visible and vibrant. It is not unusual for a resident to discover a local project through one RADO, only to find themselves collaborating with another a few months later. That is the beauty of the arts in our regions, the connections multiply.

The Riverina is a region rich in cultural heritage and a vibrant creative scene that grows daily. It is a place where tradition and innovation sit comfortably side by side, and where everyone, whether they have lived here for generations or arrived just last month, has something to contribute. Here, art is more than an expression; it is a way of connecting, building community, and making a home.



City Streets to Country Heart

SHANNEN'S CAREER MOVE AND LOVE STORY IN GRIFFITH



“I never thought I’d move out here, fall in love, buy a house, get a dog, and set up my life,” she admits. “It was completely unexpected, but now I wouldn’t change it for the world.”

Embracing Change: A Leap of Faith

When Shannen first received her permanent posting as a paramedic in Griffith in 2021, she was taken aback. Having built her life in Sydney, the idea of moving to a regional town was both daunting and unfamiliar. However, rather than resisting the change, she chose to embrace it as an adventure—a decision that would ultimately transform her life in ways she never expected.

A Career That Took Root in the Country

Shannen’s career as a paramedic has always been a demanding one, requiring her to be on call for emergencies, respond quickly under pressure, and navigate the unpredictable challenges of the job. However, working in a regional ambulance station provided her with a different pace—one that allowed her to maintain her passion without the constant burnout she had witnessed in city-based roles.

“In the city, paramedics get burned out quickly because they’re constantly running from one job to the next,” Shannen explains. “Out here in Griffith, we still have challenging cases, but we also get proper breaks, we finish our shifts on time, and we have a better work-life balance.”

Beyond her paramedic role, Shannen is also a registered nurse. To keep her nursing registration active, she works casually at Griffith Base Hospital in the Emergency Department. This dual role allows her to maintain a diverse skill set and contribute to the community in multiple ways.

Committing to the Move

Moving from Sydney to Griffith meant starting fresh. She arrived knowing no one and quickly realised she had to put herself out there to build connections.

“I had to be proactive, ask people to hang out, and make the first move socially,” she says. “But after the first few months, it got easier, and now I have an amazing group of friends.”

One of the biggest decisions she made was committing to staying for at least 12 months before considering transferring back. She wanted to give regional life a fair chance—and looking back, it’s clear that choice changed her life.

Finding Love in the Riverina

Beyond her career growth, Shannen’s move to Griffith led her to something even more unexpected—love.

“I never thought I’d move out here, fall in love, buy a house, get a dog, and set up my life,” she admits. “It was completely unexpected, but now I wouldn’t change it for the world.”

Her partner, also a shift worker, understands the demands of her job. Living in a smaller town means they get to spend more quality time together, without the long commutes and endless traffic of city life. With everything in close proximity—work, home, the gym, and recreational facilities—they make the most of their days off together.

In 2024, their love story took another exciting turn—they got engaged at the breathtaking Lake Taupo in New Zealand while on holiday. The picturesque setting made for the perfect moment, and the couple couldn't be happier about taking this next step in their journey together.

Now, they are planning their wedding for August 2025, a celebration that will bring together family and friends in a place that has become home. Their engagement has been a highlight of their time in Griffith, solidifying their decision to stay and build a future together.

The Lifestyle Perks of Griffith

Shannen has fully embraced the Griffith lifestyle. She enjoys spending time at the local cafés with friends, exploring the region's renowned wineries, and staying active by playing in a local basketball competition at the newly built Griffith Regional Sports Centre.

"There's way more infrastructure and facilities than I first expected," she says. "There are multiple gyms, a big aquatic centre, and lots of great social activities."

This sense of community and accessibility has made her appreciate regional life in a way she never anticipated.

Griffith: A Vibrant and Cosmopolitan Regional Centre

Griffith is one of Australia's most vibrant and cosmopolitan regional centres. With a population of 27,000, it boasts a rich blend of cultures and traditions. More than seventy nationalities contribute to its cultural tapestry, including Italian, Indian, Afghani, and Pacific communities.

Life in Griffith revolves around food, wine, sport, and family. Annual festivals celebrate the region's local food and world-class wines, bringing people together to enjoy the area's warm hospitality and diverse cultures. Something that Shannen has embraced and adores!

Industries & Opportunities in Griffith

Griffith is the agricultural powerhouse of the Riverina, servicing a population catchment of over 55,000. The diverse agricultural industry includes wineries, citrus, poultry, rice, grain, nuts, and cotton. The city also has a strong construction industry, primarily consisting of small, privately owned companies. Healthcare is another significant sector, as Griffith is part of the Murrumbidgee Local Health District.

There are skills gaps in information media and telecommunications, financial and insurance services, and technical/scientific services.



“It was one of the best decisions life threw at me, and I’m so glad I took the chance.”

There are also investment opportunities in housing and agritourism, making Griffith an attractive location for those looking to grow their careers or start a business.

The region is home to several towns and villages, including Griffith, Hanwood, Yenda, Lake Wyangan, Yoogali, Bilbul, Beelbanger, and Tharbogang.

A New Perspective on Country Life

Three years after making the move, Shannen has no regrets. She has built a fulfilling career, found love, bought a house, and become an active member of the Griffith community. With her upcoming wedding on the horizon, she reflects on how this unexpected journey has given her everything she never knew she needed.

"If you're even considering making a Country Change, just do it," she advises. "It was one of the best decisions life threw at me, and I'm so glad I took the chance."

For those thinking about making the move to a regional town, Shannen's journey proves that sometimes, the unexpected turns in life lead to the most incredible outcomes. Whether it's for career growth, better work-life balance, or the chance to build a new life, Griffith has given Shannen everything she never knew she needed—and more.



Family Fun to Business Bliss

THE SANDS' JOURNEY TO THE HEART OF THE MURRAY RIVER



When Brett Sands made the decision to move back to the Murray River region, little did he know that his entrepreneurial journey would thrive in such a vibrant, welcoming community. Today, he and his wife, Mel, run a successful business, enjoy a laid-back lifestyle, and love every bit of their new life in this beautiful part of Australia.

"We're lucky to be living here," says Brett, who was born and raised in Moama. "I've travelled all over the world and lived in the United States, but there's always been something that's drawn me back here. It's just a beautiful place, and the people are amazing."

Brett Sands founded Brett Sands Watersports, a company dedicated to teaching water skiing, wakeboarding, and other thrilling water sports, in 1986 when he was just 16. His family's passion for the water, though, dates back to the 1970s—a love that has fuelled his career ever since. "We used to go out camping at Wills Bend, and that's how I got involved with water skiing," Brett shares. "I wanted to compete and ended up coaching, and it just grew from there."

This passion has played a significant role in attracting not only visitors to the area but also people who have chosen to make the Murray River region their home. Brett adds, "People have come here to water ski, loved it so much, and decided to settle down. It's been really rewarding to know our business has brought so many people here and helped them find a new life."

The region is known for its natural beauty, and Mel and Brett's business is just one example of how people are finding ways to live their dreams in the Murray River area. "I love the lifestyle here," Mel says.

"I've travelled all over the world and lived in the United States, but there's always been something that's drawn me back here."

"It's so relaxing, but there's always something exciting happening. In summer, we pack the boat and go out on the river after work. It's great family time."

For the Sands family, this connection to the river isn't just for business. "We always think of the river first when visitors come to town. It's what makes this place so special.

And the benefits of country living don't stop there. The family-friendly vibe in Moama makes it an ideal place for raising children. Mel works part-time at a boutique store in the port area and also runs fitness classes at Body Strong, a local gym. She loves the town's health-conscious culture and how easy it is to stay active. "There are so many great spaces to work out and be healthy. It's one of the many perks of living in a town like this."

The Pull of the Mighty Murray River Region

Both Mel and Brett had travelled and lived in various places, but there was always a pull back to the Murray River region. For Brett, his deep ties to Moama and his love for the community made it the obvious choice. "It's home. I don't think there's a better place in the world for us to live," says Brett. Mel, too, loves the area's sense of calm and community.

“I love the lifestyle here. It’s so relaxing, but there’s always something exciting happening. In summer, we pack the boat and go out on the river after work. It’s great family time.”

“It’s a great place for kids. The schools are amazing, and there’s always something for them to do,” she says.

The couple also appreciates the region’s proximity to larger cities like Melbourne, which is just 2.5 hours away. “We’re so close to the city, so if we want to catch a game or take the kids to something special, it’s an easy trip,” says Mel. “But the best part is being able to come back to the quiet, peaceful lifestyle here after a weekend in the city.”

For Brett, running his own business in Moama has been a dream come true. “I get to spend every day on the river, coaching people and seeing the smiles on their faces. I’ve had families tell me I’ve changed their kids’ lives by getting them into water sports. That’s what makes it all worth it for me,” says Brett.

The Value of Family and Community in Country Life

In addition to their business success, Mel and Brett love the sense of community that Moama offers. “The people are amazing! I don’t think there’s any better place in the world for us to live.”

The Sands family has embraced the laid-back country lifestyle and the opportunities that come with it. Mel says, “There’s always something to do, whether it’s going to the river or grabbing a coffee at a local café. The pace of life here is perfect for raising kids and building a business.”

And the best part? They get to enjoy their days surrounded by the region’s stunning natural landscape, including majestic Redgum forests and the mighty Murray River, which forms the backdrop to many recreational activities. “We’re really lucky to have the river and the beautiful Redgums right in our backyard,” says Brett.



The couple is proud to be part of the growing Murray River community. “It’s a thriving place with a lot of opportunity,” says Brett. “From our business to the many events and festivals held throughout the year, the community really comes together to celebrate what makes this region special.”

Living the Dream in the Murray River Region

The Sands family’s entrepreneurial journey is proof that living in the Murray River region can lead to great opportunities, both in business and personal life. They’ve found not only success but also a sense of fulfilment in being part of a tight-knit community.

As Mel puts it, “Living here has been one of the best decisions we’ve ever made. The business is thriving, the kids are happy, and we get to enjoy the river every day. It’s everything we could have hoped for.”

Why Choose the Murray River Region?

Whether you’re looking to start a business, raise a family, or simply enjoy a peaceful lifestyle in a beautiful part of Australia, the Murray River region has something for everyone. With its natural beauty, welcoming community, and thriving local industries, it’s no wonder that Mel and Brett Sands have found success and happiness in this wonderful part of the country.



Embracing the Sky and the Community

ELLEN AND DOMINIC'S INSPIRING COUNTRY CHANGE
TO TEMORA SHIRE

In mid-2024, Ellen Manson and Dominic Hill made the transformative decision to leave Shellharbour on the NSW Coast and relocate to the Riverina's Temora Shire. Drawn by the promise of a slower pace, a tight-knit community, and opportunities for professional growth, they embarked on a journey that would not only advance Ellen's career, but also offer both of them a chance to fully embrace a lifestyle that perfectly aligned with their passions and aspirations.

For each of them, their drivers to move were personal. Ellen's decision to relocate was driven by her desire for a fresh start, and the town's affordable living and thriving aviation community were perfect incentives.

"Temora Shire stood out because of its aviation focus and opportunities at the Airpark Estate," Ellen explains. "The move has been incredibly rewarding, and the welcoming nature of the community, combined with its artistic and cultural scene, has made it an exciting place to live."

For Dominic, aviation has always been a central part of his life. As an aeronautical engineer and pilot, Dominic had visited Temora regularly for flight training over the years. His connection to the community deepened during these visits, and over time, what started as a professional connection to Temora's aviation scene evolved into a dream of making the town his home. The Temora Airpark Estate, where homes have their own hangar and direct runway access, was the primary draw, but the town's strategic location, conveniently situated between major cities like Canberra, Sydney, and Melbourne, was also a big appeal.

A Smooth Transition with Professional Growth

Ellen moved to Temora while completing her final year of university, studying a double degree in marketing and law through correspondence. The pursuit of career opportunities drove her decision to relocate, and she found exactly what she was seeking at Granleese & Co., a legal and conveyancing firm. The firm offered her a position that provided a breadth of experience rarely available to juniors in city law firms. This opportunity allowed Ellen to quickly immerse herself in casework, significantly expanding her professional expertise and accelerating the growth of her legal career.

"Granleese & Co. has provided a dynamic and supportive environment," Ellen shares. "Working in a regional area offers diverse casework and close client relationships, which has been a great foundation for my legal career."

For Dominic, the transition to Temora has been equally rewarding. After years of visiting Temora for flight training, he finally made the decision to establish Altavia Aerospace at the Temora Airpark, where his business has flourished.

"The location is ideal," Dominic says. "Having three generously sized runways oriented in different directions provides optimal conditions for our flight testing work. The community of experienced aircraft builders and engineers at the Airpark has been incredibly supportive, making it an ideal place to grow a business like ours."

"Housing here is far more affordable than in Shellharbour... Purchasing at the Airpark Estate was seamless, with plenty of space for both a home and a hangar. It's a dream for anyone passionate about aviation, like me."

Affordable Housing and a Relaxed Lifestyle

One of the biggest surprises for both Ellen and Dominic was how affordable housing in Temora is compared to larger cities. The property market, especially at the Airpark Estate, provided them with the perfect space.

"Housing here is far more affordable than in Shellharbour," Ellen says. "Purchasing at the Airpark Estate was seamless, with plenty of space for both a home and a hangar. It's a dream for anyone passionate about aviation, like me."

Dominic adds, "It's encouraging to see a growing town where younger people can still achieve the dream of home ownership without the burden of overwhelming mortgages."

The transition to Temora has also allowed both Ellen and Dominic to enjoy a much better work-life balance. The short commute from their home to work means they can maximise productive time while also dedicating evenings to personal pursuits. For Ellen, that includes building her aircraft in their hangar, while for Dominic, it's being fully immersed in the airpark lifestyle. "The work-life balance here is exceptional," Dominic shares. "With just a 30-second commute to my workshop, I can maximise productive time working on aircraft and prototype parts."



Thriving Arts and Cultural Scene

Beyond work, the couple has embraced the rich arts and cultural scene in Temora, which has quickly become one of the highlights of their new life. Ellen, in particular, has enjoyed engaging with the local arts community. "I've loved engaging with Temora's arts scene," she says. "The former Scout Hall is now a fantastic community art space where you can bring your own medium or try pottery. Local creators sell incredible work at Diamonds and Dust and Temora's Own Arts and Crafts, where you'll also find amazing homemade jams and cakes."

Ellen and Dominic also make time to enjoy outdoor activities, including evening walks at Lake Centenary, a beautiful spot known for its stunning landscaping and picnic spots. On weekends, they enjoy exploring nearby towns like Arian Park, Junee (with its Licorice Factory), and Young (Australia's cherry capital), which has made their time in the region even more enriching.

"The social aspect of regional living has far exceeded my expectations," Dominic says. "Having spent a decade in urban apartments where neighbour interactions were minimal, the warmth and friendliness of the Temora community was a wonderful surprise. Any concerns about isolation quickly disappeared."

The Community Spirit

Ellen and Dominic have been continually impressed by the friendly shire. "The community is extremely welcoming," Ellen says. "Whether it's fellow aviation enthusiasts at the Airpark or creatives in the local arts scene, everyone is eager to connect and support one another."

"The combination of affordable housing, strong community spirit, and excellent quality of life offers a compelling alternative to city living."

Dominic shares a similar sentiment: "While we already knew some friends at the Airpark, we've formed close bonds with many townspeople. Temora truly lives up to its reputation as the 'Friendly Shire.'"

Both Ellen and Dominic have also noticed the incredible sense of community support. For Dominic, the Airpark has become a hub of collaboration, with other aviation professionals and engineers offering their expertise to help Altavia Aerospace grow. "The willingness to collaborate and share expertise has been invaluable to our growth," he says.

A Future in Temora Shire

Both Ellen and Dominic see a bright future in Temora Shire, one that combines professional growth, a relaxed lifestyle, and a welcoming community.

"For anyone struggling with the skyrocketing property markets along the East Coast, I strongly encourage exploring opportunities in Temora," Dominic says. "The combination of affordable housing, strong community spirit, and excellent quality of life offers a compelling alternative to city living." He also adds, "The transition has been remarkably smooth. We maintain regular contact with family in Canberra and Shellharbour, and after experiencing Temora's charm, they're always eager to visit more frequently!"



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Reviving Heritage

THE REYNOLDS FAMILY HAS MADE A MARK ON JUNEE, RESTORING A BELOVED LOCAL ICON AND EMBEDDING THEMSELVES IN THIS TIGHT-KNIT COMMUNITY.



“The sense of community here is truly special.”

If you’ve ever been to Junee, you’ll know the Junee Hotel. This important piece of architecture sits at the heart of the town, watching over residents and visitors as they go about their business.

And while many things in Junee have changed since 1878, this beauty has stood the test of time. Constructed even before the local bank or post office, it was the first commercial building in the town.

Of course, over time and decades of serving others, the Junee Hotel began to show its age. It needed some love and attention. And even, perhaps, a bit of a makeover.

Enter the Reynolds family.

Relocating to the Riverina

The Reynolds made the move south to the Riverina when their children were young.

‘About ten years ago, we moved from Dubbo to Wagga Wagga due to Brendon’s job,’ explains Emma. ‘We made the move before our kids started school, which was a great decision for our family of five.’

‘Junee’s location was a perfect fit for us as well. Situated just half an hour from Wagga Wagga, it offers a sense of community while still being close to larger towns. The sense of community here is truly special.’

Preserving History

Then along came the lure of the Junee Hotel. ‘Choosing the Junee Hotel as our business venture was inspired by its immense potential and rich history. We saw an opportunity to restore this piece of history and bring it back to life,’ says Emma.

And there is plenty of history to preserve and restore. Early editions of Junee’s Southern Cross newspaper were printed in a shed out the back, while the cobblestones in the rear laneway are said to date back to the days that Light Horse Brigade meetings were held inside. Formerly known as the Railway Hotel, this matron did some heavy lifting during the railway’s busiest era.

Undergoing extensive renovations, both inside and out, has yielded stunning results. Now, the Junee Hotel embarks on an exciting new chapter in its storied history.

‘We’ve worked hard to turn things around and make improvements that respect the hotel’s history and appeal to our guests. The community has been very supportive, which keeps us motivated to keep going and continue building something special for Junee,’ Emma says.

From the historic photos on the walls to the views of the railway, this hotel is all about showcasing what makes Junee unique. ‘We’ve also focused heavily on improving the food quality, making the most of our location in the food bowl of NSW, where fresh, top-quality produce is in abundance,’ explains Emma.

Country Proud

‘We want the Junee Hotel to be a warm, welcoming place that reflects the spirit and pride of our community. Our hashtag is #countryproud.’

And the Reynolds family is definitely country proud!

‘Looking back, the move has been a rewarding and transformative experience,’ says Emma. ‘Restoring the Junee Hotel has allowed us to become part of a community that values its heritage, and the support we’ve received has been truly heartening.’



“From the moment we arrived, we’ve felt embraced and supported by the people of Junee.”

‘From the moment we arrived, we’ve felt embraced and supported by the people of Junee. We’ve built great friendships, and it’s been wonderful to feel like a part of the local fabric. We’re invited to events, and one of our kids even plays sports for Junee, which has helped us connect even more with families in town,’ adds Emma.

Getting to know Junee

Located within the beautiful Riverina region, halfway between Melbourne and Sydney, Junee has all the advantages of a smaller town while being within driving distance of the state’s largest inland city.

‘The slower pace and natural beauty of the area add a charm that is unique to regional life and really sets Junee apart as a destination,’ explains Emma.

Junee has a rich heritage and immense town pride. Its natural scenic beauty is complemented by heritage architecture. Visitors can enjoy discovering more about its railway roots at one of the most significant transport heritage sites in NSW, indulge at the Junee Licorice & Chocolate Factory, or explore the local wetlands and Murrumbidgee River.

The Canola Trail is also hugely popular with tourists and locals alike. Linking Temora and Coolamon to Junee, it winds through glowing fields of gold, and offers tourists loads of lovely homegrown experiences to boot, from the Coolamon Cheese Factory to the Junee Hotel itself.

Entrepreneurship in a Country Town

Being a small-business owner anywhere brings challenges, so what’s it like running a business in a regional town?

‘One difference from our expectations has been the amount of involvement and dedication needed to run a business in a smaller town. We knew it would take work, but regional businesses often require more personal touches and a strong commitment to building relationships..’

The family has also found a lot of support from local government particularly with the Shire’s recent Economic Development Plan that focuses on business expansion in the area. And with the launch of the Canola Trail, there’s so much new opportunity here as well!

Words of wisdom for those considering a country change

‘If you’re thinking about making a move to a regional area – or even returning after time away – our advice is to embrace the slower pace and enjoy the community spirit. Take time to build relationships with locals. It’s amazing how welcoming people can be, and those connections really enrich the experience,’ says Emma.

‘Be prepared for some adjustments, as regional life has its own unique pace and resources. The benefits are real, especially if you appreciate a more laid-back lifestyle with strong community ties. Ultimately, if you’re open to new experiences and ready to get involved, the transition can be incredibly rewarding.’

And as for the future of the Junee Hotel? ‘Our goal is to ensure the hotel stands strong for another 150 years, giving future generations a beautiful place to connect and enjoy.’





Carmine Cantone

THE ITALIAN BARBER BRINGING TRADITION
AND WARMTH TO NARRANDERA



Carmine Cantone, a seasoned barber with over 50 years of experience, has carved out a niche for himself in Narrandera, in the heart of the Riverina, New South Wales. His parents, originally from a small Italian village, emigrated to Adelaide in the 1930's.

His journey has since taken him across different landscapes, from Adelaide to Bourke, Byrock, Cobar, and Wagga Wagga, before finally settling in Narrandera. With a passion for his trade and a love for community, Carmine has found the perfect blend of opportunity and lifestyle in his new home.

The Journey to Narrandera

Carmine's move to Narrandera was driven by both business and personal considerations. After running four hairdressing outlets in Wagga Wagga, he noticed a shift in consumer behaviour. Online shopping and changing market dynamics led him to explore new locations. Narrandera, with its welcoming community and strong demand for a traditional barber, presented an opportunity too good to pass up.

"I was based in Cobar before moving to Wagga, and my eldest son was at university there, so we moved to support him. We found country towns to be very friendly, and there are a lot of resources if you go looking for them," Carmine explains. "Narrandera looked like a nice little town, and we were seeing a lot of clients coming over to Wagga from there. Once I started coming here regularly, meeting the locals, and getting involved in cultural activities, it felt like home."

This transition was further cemented when he was approached to sell his Wagga outlets. "That was the perfect opportunity to move permanently," he says.

"I had already made friends, and acquaintances, and was enjoying the relaxed atmosphere. It's very family-oriented—just smile at someone here, and they smile back. They invite you into their homes, which you don't experience in the city anymore."

Embracing the Old-World Charm

Beyond the business opportunity, Narrandera's architecture played a crucial role in Carmine's decision. "I love old buildings. When this one came up for sale, I saw the potential. I haven't quite embraced the modern age yet—if it doesn't work on steam, I can't operate it!" he jokes.

"When we purchased it with the intentions of becoming my home and my place of work. We started scratching the surface and realised we had to go right back to the basics for renovation. It's been a lot more work than I expected, but I enjoy it."

The Italian Barber: A Community Hub

Carmine's business model is unique in the region, focusing exclusively on men's grooming. "When I moved to Narrandera, there was a local barber, but he was quite ill. By catering solely to male clients, I found a large opening in the market, and I've got a very good following" he explains.

We don't just do haircuts—we create a relaxed atmosphere. Clients come in, sit down, chat, and have a coffee. I've had a few that come in and make their own coffee sit down and make it for a couple of other clients. It's about friendship as much as it is about business."

“People here embrace you with open arms. All it takes is a smile...”

A Town That Embraces Newcomers

One of the most striking aspects of Narrandera, according to Carmine, is its welcoming nature. “People here embrace you with open arms. All it takes is a smile, and they’ll talk to you in the street. If you’ve been closed for a day, they’ll ask where you were and if everything’s okay. It’s not superficial; people genuinely care.”

The sense of community extends beyond his clients. “Here, I might walk down to the shops and for me, and you’ll end up chatting to people along the way. The mailman’s the same, he’ll chat to you in the street and if he’s got your mail, he’ll hand it to you when you’re walking past. It’s more than just a job to most of these people, it’s part of their social structure.”

Narrandera: A Town with History and Heart

Nestled in the heart of the Riverina, Narrandera Shire offers a welcoming atmosphere, saturated with rich culture and history. The town’s name comes from the Wiradjuri word “Narrungdera,” meaning “place of lizard or goanna,” a nod to the rich Indigenous heritage of the area.

With a population of nearly 6,000 people and covering 4,118 square kilometres, Narrandera has long been a place where history and opportunity meet. The region is home to not just Narrandera but also the close-knit villages of Barellan, Binya, Grong Grong, Kamarah, and Sandigo, all contributing to the unique character of the area.

The town is also well-connected—just 554km from Sydney, 338km from Canberra, and 433km from Melbourne—making it an ideal place for those looking to escape the hustle of the city while still staying in touch with the world.

For Carmine, this blend of history, opportunity, and hospitality made Narrandera the perfect place to put down roots and bring his old-world craftsmanship to a new home.

Finding Joy Beyond Work

Carmine’s love for hands-on craftsmanship extends beyond barbering. “I do leather work and make pieces. I’ve met other Italians here, so I’ve been able to get back into salami making, preserving – olives and grapes, tomatoe sauce.

I like doing things from scratch and making things. For example, with the leather work, I like to learn how to do something and then try it, I’m very tactile. I was also once into archery, making my own arrows.”

His background in wool classing is another fascinating aspect of his past. “I’ve got a professional wool-classing ticket, I did wool-classing, and we bought a sheep station and I topped the wool pricing industry for 6–7 years. We sold it eventually, but at the time I had taken South Australian sheep out of Queensland, because their wool becomes finer, and we got down to 21 microns which is very fine.”

Advice for Those Considering a Regional Move

For anyone thinking of moving to a town like Narrandera, Carmine has simple advice: “Do it!”

“The hardest part is taking the first step, but once you do, you’ll find incredible support. Council is a great place to start if you need guidance. Housing is affordable, there are schools for your children, and plenty of work opportunities if you look for them. If you’ve got a business idea, try it. The community will back you.”

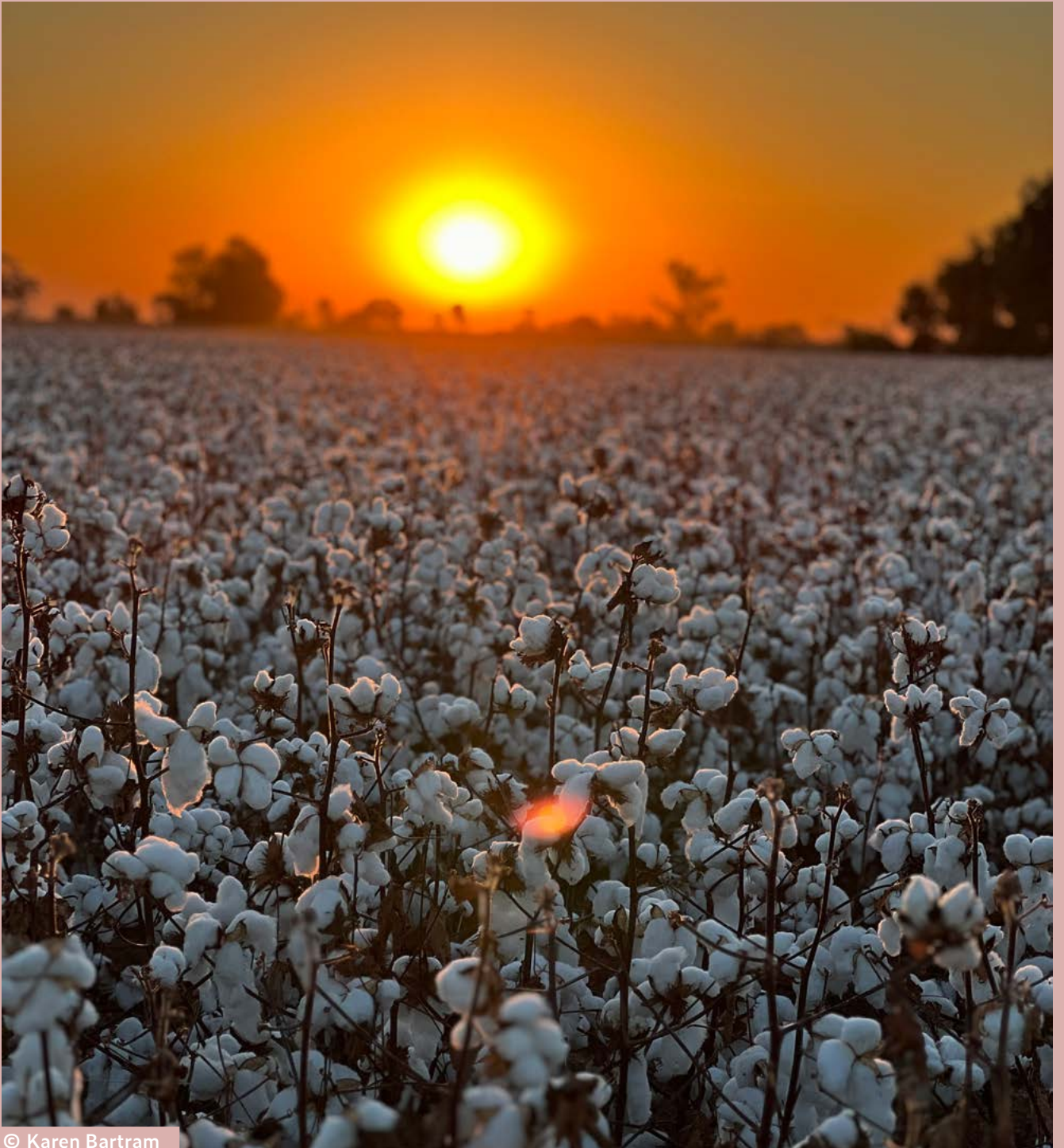
Ultimately, regional living offers a different kind of richness. “We might be out of town, but we’re not out of touch. And the pressure isn’t there like in the city. Here, life is about connection, support, and a sense of belonging.”

Carmine Cantone’s journey from a bustling city barber to a beloved regional figure proves that sometimes, the best opportunities aren’t in the fast-paced urban centres but in the heart of a small town where a smile still goes a long way.

“If you’ve got a business idea, try it. The community will back you.”



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Find Your Balance in Leeton

A PLACE FOR CONNECTION AND CONVENIENCE



Leeton Shire: Where Lifestyle and Opportunity Meet

Imagine a place where your commute is a short walk, where friendly faces greet you daily, and where starting a business feels like joining a supportive community. Leeton Shire offers all this and more. For Bree Tucker, moving from the bustling Gold Coast to Leeton meant finding a work-life balance that made sense. Now thriving in her business, Bree highlights the convenience, connection, and opportunities that make Leeton the ideal place for a tree change.

Opportunities for Entrepreneurs

Leeton isn't just a great place to live; it's also full of opportunities for entrepreneurs. Bree's business, Haús of Vitality, which provides luxury wellness services, is a shining example of how innovative ideas can take root and flourish in regional areas. With her background in holistic health, Bree saw an opportunity to offer something unique to Leeton—a wellness business with a modern twist. "Starting a business in Leeton has been incredibly rewarding," Bree shares. "The community here really rallies behind you, and there's so much support for small businesses."

Leeton's affordable cost of living makes it easier for new entrepreneurs to start and sustain businesses. Bree's story proves that regional towns like Leeton are not just quiet retreats but vibrant hubs where people with new ideas and fresh energy can truly make an impact.

“The sense of safety and support we have for our family is unmatched.”

"People in small towns want and expect the same high-quality services they'd find in the city," she says. "And when you deliver that, they support you wholeheartedly."

A Welcoming Community for Families

If you're looking for a place to raise a family, Leeton's close-knit community makes it an ideal choice. Bree and her husband decided to settle down in Leeton to be near his family, and they now have a young son who is thriving in the community. "Raising our son in a small town was important to me," Bree explains. "The sense of safety and support we have for our family is unmatched."

Leeton's local schools, parks, and sports facilities provide plenty of opportunities for children to grow and explore. With short commutes, more time for after-school activities, and a slower pace of life, Leeton gives families the space to enjoy quality time together. Bree says, "It's so refreshing to have everything we need within such a short distance. My commute is three minutes, and that means more time with my family."



Building Connections in the Heart of Australia's Food Bowl

Leeton's reputation as the Heart of Australia's Food Bowl comes from its rich agricultural history and flourishing industries like rice, wine, and citrus production. But beyond its economic backbone, it's the people who make Leeton truly special. Bree talks about the ease of building strong community connections in Leeton, which has been key to her business success and personal fulfillment. "The people here are extremely inviting, especially if you involve yourself in the community. The support for local business is incredible," she says.

A Lifestyle That Puts Well-Being First

Leeton's lifestyle is one that encourages well-being and balance. Bree's business is just one example of how residents in Leeton are embracing the benefits of a healthier lifestyle. Whether it's hiking through the nearby Fivebough Wetlands, enjoying local produce from the bustling farmers' markets, or simply appreciating the slower pace of life, Leeton offers many ways to focus on physical and mental health.

Bree believes the lifestyle in Leeton is a breath of fresh air compared to the stresses of city living. "I love the fresh air here," she says. "Being outdoors, walking, and paddleboarding in the river in summer is my favourite thing to do. It's good for the soul." The lack of traffic, the quiet mornings, and the wide-open spaces have all contributed to a better work-life balance for Bree and her family.

Arts and Culture

Leeton is not only a hub for nature lovers but also offers rich cultural experiences. The town is home to the Roxy Theatre, offering live performances and film screenings. Leeton's unique blend of heritage, arts, and festivals create a lively cultural atmosphere that enhances the regional living experience.

"We feel lucky to have made the move here... The move to Leeton has given us a better life, and the people here have been a huge part of that."

A Place Where You Belong

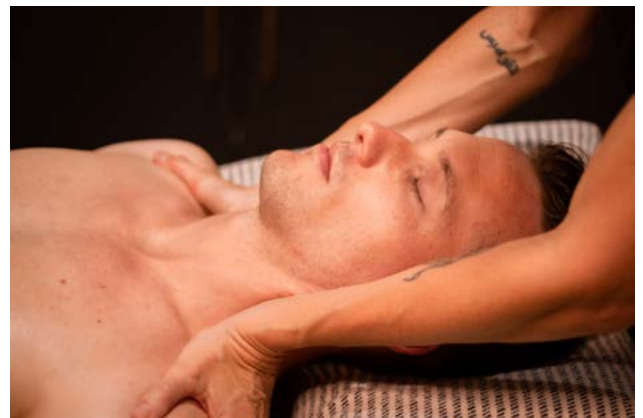
For anyone considering a tree change, Leeton offers the best of both worlds—peaceful, small-town living with the convenience of modern amenities and a community that will embrace you as one of their own. Whether you're an entrepreneur looking to launch your next big idea, a family looking for a safe and supportive environment, or someone seeking a more balanced, fulfilling life, Leeton is a place where you can truly belong.

For Bree, and many more Country Changers who have made the move, Leeton is more than just a place to live; it's a thriving community with endless opportunities for personal, professional, and family growth. Whether you're seeking a slower-paced lifestyle, entrepreneurial opportunities, or a welcoming community to raise a family, Leeton offers the perfect environment for a tree change.

"We feel lucky to have made the move here," Bree says. "The move to Leeton has given us a better life, and the people here have been a huge part of that. If you're thinking of making a tree change, go on an adventure—you won't regret it!"

Ready to Make a Country Change?

If you're looking for a place that offers connection, convenience, and a lifestyle that puts well-being first, Leeton could be the perfect spot for your next big move.





A New Business, Close-Knit Community and her Own Home

BEC'S UNEXPECTED GIFTS FROM A TREE CHANGE

“This is home and this is where I’ll stay.”

Sometimes, even the most carefully laid plans go awry. Sometimes, something better happens instead.

After diligently devising a 10-year plan to make the move from Melbourne, just a few short years later, Bec Marshall found herself living in her favourite place.

‘I’m a rower, and every year, for years and years, we’d drive from Melbourne to Wentworth for the Easter Regatta, on the Darling River,’ she explains. ‘Then later on in the year, I’d go back to Wentworth for the Flying Doctor Rowathon, which was rowing huge kilometres in a day to raise money for the Royal Flying Doctor Service.’

She fell in love with the area. ‘I was so taken with Wentworth, the town and the people, that in 2017, I decided to set myself a 10-year plan to move here,’ Bec says.

‘But just two-and-a-half years into my perfectly designed plan, driving back from a holiday in Wentworth, I decided – why wait? I gave my employer in Melbourne six months’ notice, and I officially became a Wentworth resident on July 1st, 2019.’

No Regrets For This Tree Changer

Leaving city life behind and making the move to the country felt right for Bec.

‘The town, the community, the attractions, the landscapes [and] being so close to two rivers all helped make my decision,’ she says.

‘The move was easy. I had some wonderful friends who assisted with the move itself and then some more wonderful friends who accommodated me, guided and advised me once I got here, until I had my feet grounded.’

Bec told herself that if she didn’t enjoy her new home, she could always return to Melbourne. But Wentworth won her over, and there’s never been a day when she’s regretted the move.

‘To this day, I’ve never once thought about leaving. This is home, and this is where I’ll stay.’



The Unexpected Gift of Home Ownership

The move hasn’t just given Bec a better work/life balance, but improved housing affordability has also allowed her to buy her first home.

‘Coming from Melbourne, I could never see myself owning a home. Prices were ridiculous and made it not achievable on a single income to be able to purchase.’ But more favourable conditions in Wentworth Shire presented her with a dream she had thought impossible.

‘I’ll never forget when I approached the bank and went through some initial figures to see about a possible loan. The bank sat there, laughed and said, “You won’t believe this, but even paying a mortgage, you’ll still be saving.” And that combined will be less than the rent I was paying in Melbourne. Not long after that, I purchased my first home!’

Business Opportunities in an Untapped Market

Bec’s tree change also paved the way for the creation of a side business she loves.

‘Since being in Wentworth, I’ve thrown myself into the community and found there was a need for social media support and website creation. From there, Junction Media Consulting was formed three-and-a-half years ago.’

Bec says 98% of her customers are local businesses. ‘As a small business owner, I try to assist other businesses and community groups within our amazing region. Working with these local businesses has been a great way to become embedded in the fabric of a community.’



“Be open-minded, immerse yourself... make changes that suit your new lifestyle—your ‘new you’.”

And it's proven a successful formula – Junction Media Consulting has gone from strength to strength.

Bec also services her community as the Community Development & Marketing Coordinator at the Community Bank Wentworth & District. 'I love my role as every day I'm working with someone from the community. Community banks are all about giving back to the community, and I love that I get to do this on a daily basis.'

Feeling Supported in a Close Community

Bec has loved being part of such a friendly and supportive community. 'The community of Wentworth welcomed me with open arms, and I'm so grateful for that as it makes, and still makes, the transition so much easier.'

It also makes challenging times a lot more navigable. The 2022 floods proved a scary time for Wentworth locals. 'We're very lucky that we have a levy bank surrounding the town, but there were still some hairy and anxious moments, and when you have the junction of the two biggest rivers on your doorstep,' she says.



Once again, the Wentworth community proved they have each other's backs. 'Like rural and small towns do, people supported each other, and the community came together, which was a special thing to be part of.'

Natural Beauty Abounds in Wentworth Shire

While the Murray and Darling Rivers flowed a little too strong during the floods, they are ordinarily a scenic drawcard for Wentworth Shire residents and visitors.

Bec herself is Captain and Head Coach of the Wentworth District Rowing Club, while her dog Billy loves swimming in the river and others enjoy water skiing, sailing and fishing. Additional natural highlights in the region include the Perry Sandhills and River Red Gums.

The area has a rich history, as visitors will discover in the Old Wentworth Gaol, Wentworth Military Collection and Wentworth Pioneer Museum. The Wentworth Show offers another opportunity to celebrate the unique character of the regions and Bec enjoys her role as Publicity Officer and Committee member.

Advice for others considering a tree change

"If a tree change is something you've been thinking about, don't wait—just bite the bullet and give it a go. You won't regret it. I came with no big expectations, just a hope for a different, more relaxed life—and that's exactly what I've found. I'm still busy, but it's a more relaxed kind of busy. The simple things have become a priority. My advice? Be open-minded, immerse yourself in your new community, and make changes that suit your new lifestyle—your 'new you'."



Wagga Isn't Just a Place to
Live: It's a Place to Belong

Watching your child giggle under gum trees. Spending lazy afternoons splashing in the local river. Hiking nearby summits on crisp country mornings. These are the moments that have made the Rehman family pause, and feel gratitude for their country change.

They're the moments that have made Wagga Wagga feel like home.

'Wagga has been incredibly kind to us,' explains proud father and husband, Malik. 'We've made friends who feel like family, and neighbours always ready to lend a hand.'

Malik and his wife Mehwish believe the Riverina gem is a wonderful place to raise a family. 'It's that rare mix of simplicity and security,' Malik explains. 'Everything's within a short drive – schools, parks, shops, healthcare.'

But despite being a thriving regional centre, Wagga still retains its country charm and tranquillity. 'I love the calm. I love being able to drive across town without traffic. I love that we're midway between Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra, yet it never feels rushed. Most of all, I love the safety and the sense of belonging – the way people genuinely look out for each other.'

Being here during a period of company growth gave me the chance to grow too... Wagga rewards hard work and offers space for everyone to succeed.

The right opportunity at the right time

Of course, making the 'country change' has been quite the journey for the family.

Moving from Pakistan to Australia was a big change initially, and with family remaining overseas, it sometimes felt challenging. 'Back home, I grew up surrounded by extended family; moving overseas, we had to figure things out ourselves,' says Malik.

And of course, they didn't make the country change immediately. The couple spent six years in Sydney, adding to their family with the arrival of their son Zayyan. '[Sydney] was exciting, fast-paced – but also hectic in ways that made us crave something different.'



A job opportunity brought the family to Wagga Wagga two-and-a-half years ago. 'When I was offered a role at Daimler Trucks Wagga, it felt like the right opportunity at the right time,' says Malik. 'I'd always wanted to work closely with brands like Mercedes-Benz and Freightliner. But it wasn't just about the job – I was curious to experience life in regional Australia. I'd heard about the slower pace, community spirit and open spaces, and I wanted that for our family.'

Malik has experienced impressive career growth in his short time in the regional centre. 'Moving to Wagga wasn't just a change of scenery – it was a launchpad. I started as Parts Manager at Daimler Trucks Wagga and, within two years, was promoted to Group Parts Manager.'

'Being here during a period of company growth gave me the chance to grow too. I've seen friends start businesses, take risks and thrive. Wagga rewards hard work and offers space for everyone to succeed.'

A healthier, happier way of life

It wasn't just career prospects awaiting the family in Wagga, but also lifestyle opportunities.

'The difference [in lifestyle] is night and day,' explains Malik. 'In Sydney, long commutes left me drained. Here, I come home with energy – to play with Zayyan, go for a walk or enjoy dinner together. We've gained time – real, quality time – and life feels healthier, more balanced, and safer.'

Wagga's abundance of education, sporting and leisure facilities has also been a pleasant surprise for the young family. 'We've been surprised by how many school and activity options there are here.'



'In Sydney, life was so hectic, I barely had time for sports. Here, I've picked up squash and badminton again. With Charles Sturt University nearby, there are lots of community sports and events. From cycling and cricket to hiking and football, there's something for everyone. And as a dad, it's comforting to know everything we need is just minutes away.'

Malik says that since their move to Wagga, life has become manageable again. 'Mehwish even learned to drive here – something she never felt confident doing in Sydney. I'll never forget her first solo drive with Zayyan – she was beaming with pride. That independence and safety are priceless.'

Nestled on the banks of the Murrumbidgee River, with beautiful parks, Lake Albert and close to The Rock Nature Reserve (Kengal Aboriginal Place), Wagga boasts plenty of natural attractions. Many have been the backdrop for special family memories for the Rehmans. 'With spots like the Botanic Gardens, Wagga Beach, strawberry picking and sunset walks around the lake, we're creating lifelong memories together.'

Its unique location, sitting between capital cities, is another convenient feature. 'With Sydney and Melbourne just four to five hours away, we're never too far from celebrating big moments with friends. Every time someone travels through, they stay with us and we get to show off the beauty of Wagga, Albury and the surrounds.'

But beyond all of its impressive attributes, it's the sense of community that has made Wagga feel like home for the Rehmans. 'Behind it all is the peace of knowing that help, if ever needed, is close by. Wagga isn't just a place to live – it's a place to belong,' says Malik.

“Behind it all is the peace of knowing that help, if ever needed, is close by. Wagga isn't just a place to live – it's a place to belong.”

'Every friendly nod from a stranger, every quiet drive with no traffic, and the peace of having healthcare nearby as new parents – it all added up. Wagga didn't just welcome us; it embraced us.'

Malik can sum up Wagga in just three words: 'Opportunity. Peace. Freedom.'

Advice for fellow country changers

'It's a big decision, and the unknown can feel overwhelming. But if you're even thinking about it, I'd say take the leap. Regional life doesn't mean giving things up; it means gaining what you didn't know you were missing!

'You can still have a great career and good income – but with bigger homes, cleaner air, more time with your family, and a sense of calm you won't find in a big city. And you'll be surrounded by people who genuinely care.'

Keen to learn more about life in Wagga Wagga? If you're contemplating a Country Change, please get in touch with our friendly team. We're always here to help.

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Deniliquin Riverside Walk

From City to Country

SKYE QUIRK'S BIG MOVE FROM WOLLONGONG TO DENILIKUIN

“I visited Deniliquin with my friend, spending only 24 hours in the town, and I fell in love.”

A Lifestyle Change Driven by Housing Affordability

When asked what motivated her move from coastal Wollongong to the inland town of Deniliquin in the Edward River Council area, Skye Quirk didn't hesitate: “My main motivation for the move was the affordability of housing, and the unrealistic goal of buying a home in Wollongong. Even just renting in Wollongong is a struggle with the rise in prices and cost of living – there was no opportunity to save.”

Skye's decision reflects a growing trend of young Australians leaving expensive urban centres in search of a more sustainable and balanced lifestyle in regional towns. In fact, Millennials are leading this charge, with the Regional Australia Institute reporting that over 54,000 more millennials moved from capital cities to regional areas between 2016 and 2021 than in the previous five-year period. Factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, soaring housing costs, and the desire for a slower pace of life are all contributing to this regional migration trend.

Falling in Love with Deniliquin

Skye's first encounter with Deniliquin was brief but impactful.

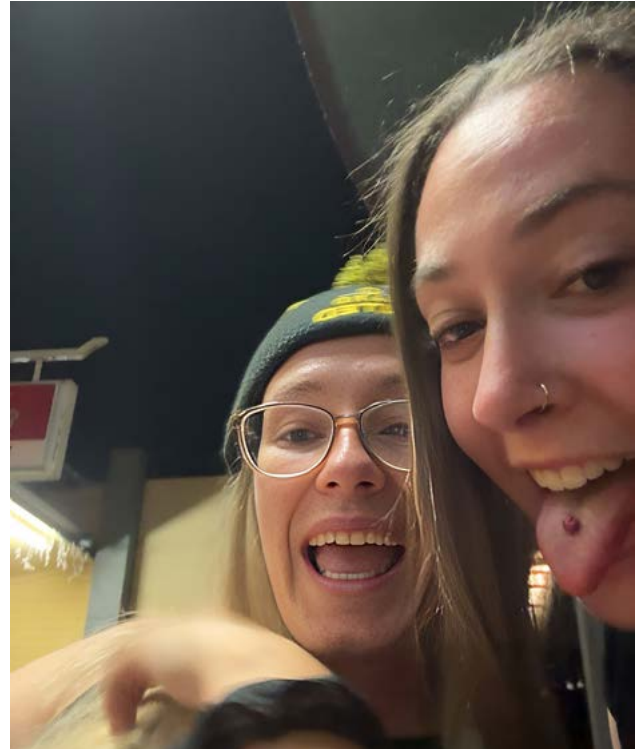
“I visited Deniliquin with my friend, spending only 24 hours in the town, and I fell in love. The overall vibe of lifestyle, personality, and it is just so much slower-paced than Wollongong,” she says.

That initial spark led her to return for a longer stay. “After looking into the town more after I visited, I came back for a week to fully explore, and that's when I made my decision for the move!”

Housing: A Major Drawcard Despite Challenges

As one of the primary reasons for her move, Skye was especially struck by the contrast in housing prices.

“Affordability in Deniliquin is, as I said, one of my biggest motivations for the move! Very different price ranges compared to where I am from. I mean, the houses here can be up to half the price!”



And the data backs up Skye's experience. As of December 2022, the median house price in Deniliquin was just \$350,000, significantly lower than urban markets like Wollongong, where the median can exceed \$900,000. For renters, the median weekly rent was \$290 as of March 2023 — a welcome relief for those escaping the rising rental prices seen in larger cities. These figures highlight the real financial benefits of making the move to regional areas like the Edward River Council region.

Employment Opportunities in Regional Towns

Skye's job hunt turned out to be surprisingly straightforward. As a childcare worker, her skills are in high demand, and she secured a job easily at River Region Early Education, which offers pre-school and child care throughout the region.

“I personally found it quite easy to find employment in Deniliquin. A couple months before I intended on moving, I applied for a job online purely just to get my name out there. A week or so later I got the call that a position that perfectly suited me had become available.”

“I personally found it quite easy to find employment... A couple months before I intended on moving, I applied for a job... a week or so later I got the call!”

Finding the Right Balance

With full-time work and university studies to juggle, Skye was initially balancing two jobs and part-time uni in Wollongong. Now, she says, life looks very different.

"I work five days a week Monday – Friday, different from me balancing two jobs on top of part time uni studies. I now get the afternoons and weekends to do my uni studies, catch up with friends and go to the gym. My work-life balance has improved a lot!"

Living in Deniliquin also means enjoying life by the water. Situated on the Edward River, the town offers a laid-back, nature-rich lifestyle that's hard to come by in urban centres. From riverside walks and kayaking to peaceful spots perfect for reading or picnics, the natural setting plays a big role in helping residents like Skye unwind and stay connected to the outdoors. It's a key part of why so many people are finding regional life more fulfilling.

A Warm Welcome

One of the most surprising aspects of her new life has been the openness of the local community.

"The community has been more welcoming than I could have imagined. Everyone is so helpful and supportive. I enjoy the local cafes and the staff in stores, they are willing to chat about their experience in the town and share great places to explore!"

For newcomers wanting to meet people with similar interests, Deniliquin offers plenty of options. From The Depot — a unique automotive and heritage museum that hosts community events — to the creative programs run by South West Arts, there are countless ways to get involved. A huge variety of events, festivals, and local clubs are active throughout the year, making it easy to find your people and become part of the vibrant Edward River community.

"Making friends and meeting new people hasn't been difficult, The Deniliquin Show is a great way for the community to come together, along with social groups and even just going down to the local pubs and cafes."

Surpassing Expectations

Reflecting on the overall experience of relocating, Skye admits that her expectations were far exceeded, with only a couple of minor hurdles.

"The move was difficult at the beginning when I was trying to find a rental due to there not being many available, although once I sorted out my housing situation, everything got easier from there."

Having a job lined up and having explored the area prior to the move definitely made things go more smoothly for me."

One of the challenges in the region has been access to healthcare, with a growing need for more health professionals. This presents a significant opportunity for healthcare workers across various disciplines to relocate and fill this gap.

Despite these obstacles, Skye says the benefits of living in the area continue to outweigh the drawbacks.

"I didn't expect everyone to be so welcoming! I walk every day and the regular cars that pass by me wave out the window at me, everyone I cross says good morning/afternoon. In Wollongong, you're lucky to get a head nod half of the time!"

She also discovered more local amenities than she anticipated. "The town has a lot more to offer than I imagined, when it comes to cafes, schools, pharmacies and grocery stores – I thought we would be way more limited. Definitely less variety than Wollongong, but more than I was expecting!"

Embracing the Local Lifestyle

Life in Deniliquin has also meant reconnecting with nature. When she's not working or studying, Skye is out enjoying the region's natural beauty and charm.

"I enjoy walking, the river walk is great! Stopping at the local cafes where a chat is always welcome. Watching the sunrise or sunset – somehow every single day, they're just beautiful out here."

"I always am so excited about all of the wildlife we get to see! We head out of town to Mathoura and pass emus or in town we see kangaroos all around. Something you don't see in Wollongong!"

"There's a great park too – even the adults can have fun there. There's a bike track, basketball hoop and room for picnics or barbecues. I love heading down to the Waring Gardens in the centre of town, watching the ducks and reading a book."

Advice for Future Movers

Skye's advice for those considering a similar move is practical and positive.

"I would definitely have started looking into a doctor before moving, as an asthmatic and someone who needs to take regular medication. If you're tired of the overpopulation in the city, Edward River is the place to be. So much slower, calmer and welcoming!"



City Lights to Rural Idyll

NOELENE AND STEVE'S COUNTRY CHANGE TO HOLBROOK



One of the couple's biggest motivating factors was finally building their dream house.



After more than two decades living in the bustling regional city of Albury—and with earlier chapters spent in major metropolitan centres like Geelong and Perth—Noelene and Steve knew it was time for a change.

"We were looking for a quieter lifestyle," says Noelene. "Albury has grown to be a much larger centre in recent years, with a much increased population."

What followed was a deliberate and thoughtful decision to leave behind the growing pace of regional urban life and make a true "country change"—a move that has not only transformed their daily rhythm, but also enabled them to build their dream home and shape a lifestyle rooted in simplicity, community, and sustainability.

Finding Their New Home: Welcome to Holbrook

The couple explored their options before deciding on the southern Riverina town of Holbrook, part of the Greater Hume Shire. Known for its submarine museum and rich farming history, Holbrook offers a peaceful yet well-served lifestyle.

"Holbrook was where we eventually decided to build, as land was affordable and it has good basic amenities—supermarket/hardware, pubs, cafes, clubs, child care and healthcare services," says Noelene.

For many considering a move to the country, infrastructure and access to services can make or break a location. For Noelene and Steve, Holbrook hit the sweet spot—small enough to slow down, but still with everything they needed.

From Big Plans to Small Footprints

One of the biggest motivating factors in their move was the opportunity to finally build the kind of home they had always dreamed of—affordable, intentional, and designed with sustainability in mind.

"Moving to a regional area was the only way we could afford to build at our age," Noelene explains. "We had a budget for our new build, and land affordability was a big consideration in the equation."

That build is now complete—and it's more than just a house. It's a reflection of their values.

"Our new home is beautiful," she says. "The fact we designed and built it ourselves as a project to showcase living small and sustainably—that means a lot. We have achieved a very low-cost and affordable way of living that should be adopted by Government as the way of the future."

Their aim was simple: create a smaller footprint, and greater financial freedom heading into retirement. But Noelene believes it's a model that could offer solutions to much broader issues, too.

"With the cost of living and young people being priced out of the housing market, what we have showcased is a very appealing option for many."

Slower Pace, Bigger Horizons

Since moving to Holbrook, life for the couple has taken on a whole new rhythm.

“Just do it! With housing affordability the main focus in Australia today, looking at where, how and what we live in requires that moving away from major cities and centres can provide a great option.”

“Much slower, more relaxed (once we actually finish the house),” Noelene says with a smile. “And in a great location in that we have options of Albury, Wagga Wagga, Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney all less than five hours’ drive.”

That strategic proximity to major hubs offers flexibility and freedom—whether it’s catching up with family and friends, accessing larger services, or simply enjoying a change of scenery.

But day-to-day life is now delightfully simple.

“As I am still working full-time and Steve is semi-retired, our day-to-day life has changed for the better. The quieter and slower pace of regional towns makes you take more time for the things you enjoy.”

Community Connection and Local Life

Relocating to a small town often raises the question: how easy is it to integrate?

“It is very much a personal choice as to how you integrate into a smaller community,” Noelene shares. “But everyone is very helpful and we enjoy meeting new people.”

For this social couple, settling in was made even easier thanks to the region’s events and hospitality scene.

“We are quite social so have enjoyed many of the local events, and social nights put on in the town. The new Holbrook Hotel has provided some amazing food and wine dinner events that rival any city restaurants, and there is always something happening around the region.”

From trivia nights and pub dinners to community gatherings and art shows, life in Greater Hume offers a rich social calendar for those keen to get involved.

Living and Working Locally

One of the practical wins of their move has been the ability to live and work in the same community.

“Yes, we have both been able to find employment in Holbrook,” Noelene says. “Myself at the Greater Hume Council.”

Having her workplace just minutes away has added to the quality of life the couple were seeking, though Noelene notes that proximity to Albury still leaves options open.

“It certainly is convenient, but it is only a 30-minute drive to Albury, so there would always have been options to work there also.”

A Daily Dose of Country Magic

While the practical and financial advantages of their move are clear, for Noelene and Steve, the emotional rewards are just as significant.

“Our new home and the quiet, laid-back lifestyle we now enjoy—that’s been the biggest highlight,” says Noelene. “There is something to be said for the country air, and the sunrises and sunsets are amazing.”

It’s the kind of beauty and simplicity that doesn’t show up on spreadsheets, but makes all the difference in daily life.

Advice for Others: “Just Do It”

For others considering a similar move, Noelene’s message is clear.

“Just do it! With housing affordability the main focus in Australia today, looking at where, how and what we live in requires that moving away from major cities and centres can provide a great option.”

Their story is one of careful planning, but also of boldness and belief. In moving to Holbrook, Noelene and Steve didn’t just change their address—they redefined what their future could look like.



Holbrook Hotel



© Matt Beaver

Finding Sweetness in Coolamon

THIS YOUNG FAMILY MADE A BOLD COUNTRY CHANGE
TO LAUNCH THEIR BEE POLLINATION BUSINESS.

“When we arrived in Coolamon, there was such a strong sense of community”

Natalie and Joel Shave have been as busy as, well, bees.

The couple, along with their two daughters, made a huge life change several years ago, packing up their lives in Brisbane and moving to Coolamon, NSW, in February 2022.

Moving with a four-year-old and a four-month-old is not for the faint of heart. But the couple were driven by their passion to launch a business and create a slower-paced life in the country for their girls.

‘The motivation for our move was the culmination of a few factors – namely our decision to start a commercial beekeeping business, COVID restrictions easing in NSW, and our tenancy lease coming to an end, all underpinned by a long-standing desire to live in the rural countryside.’

When they’re not working on the business, you’ll find the young family swimming at Middle Beach and canoeing on the Murrumbidgee River, horse riding or exploring the scenic region.

Building Community Connections in Coolamon

Leaving city life and their support network back in Brisbane, the young parents found the move isolating at first. ‘[But] as we began to establish some roots and community connections, and with our children getting older, we’ve been able to transition away from the fight or flight responses, and allow ourselves to find more time for our family to relax and connect.’

And ultimately, the close-knit community began to feel like their home, too. ‘When we arrived in Coolamon, there was such a strong sense of community it was a bit intimidating to be honest. I imagine this to be the case in any move to a regional town unless you already have ties to the area. As welcoming as the locals were, it was a good year or so before we began to feel like this is our home.’

But now the Shave family are indeed an important part of the Coolamon community. ‘The community has been very welcoming. Everyone is kind and happy to help, which very much aligns with our values.’



© Matt Beaver

For the love of bees

One conversation in 2018 was all it took to ignite Joel and Natalie’s passion for bees. But what began as a hobby soon evolved into a shared calling and prompted their dramatic career shift from finance, and their move from Brisbane to regional NSW. It also sparked their launch of a new rural life as they built up their bee-focused business, Waggle & Round, and became a beloved local honey producer.

Their role in the local agriculture industry has also helped them to earn a place within the community. ‘Our business Waggle & Round primarily focuses on honey production and crop pollination. However, we’re always on the lookout for opportunities to collaborate with local businesses.’

Things haven’t always been easy, but the couple are adamant that they’ve always been worth it.

‘Owning our own business is the hardest yet most rewarding experience. We’ve faced some significant challenges since moving to Coolamon to start Waggle & Round. From Varroa Mite and the COVID-like movement restrictions, to heavy rain and flooding, and now this year, no rain and minimal flowering flora, resulting in cancelled pollination contracts and disruptions to our honey-production efforts.’

‘The learning curve was steep and we had much to learn about running a commercial-sized beekeeping business.’

‘We have a whole new respect for farmers now. The mental strength it takes to overcome the stress and endure the tough times – most of which are caused by factors outside your control – is next level. We’ve both grown to be better versions of ourselves as a result of the challenges we’ve faced.’



The family now enjoys a work-life balance.

Embracing the regional work-life balance

One of the benefits of their tree change is the fantastic work-life balance the couple have been able to carve out, though with a brand new business, it wasn't always easy, particularly in the beginning.

Natalie says, 'Striking a good work/life balance wasn't easy – frankly, it was a big challenge that we had to overcome! But now that we have a few years under our belt, we can better plan and anticipate our days/weeks/months, which enables us to find that healthy balance our family needs.'

'I find I'm able to be home more on average than I would be if I were working a job and commuting. Sure, we may be sacrificing some earning potential, but it's a healthier decision while our family is still young.'

Choosing Coolamon

There are hundreds of reasons why someone might choose Coolamon for their tree change, with its blend of rural charm and modern amenities. The town boasts beautifully preserved heritage architecture and offers boutique shops, cozy cafes, yummy local foods (like the Coolamon Cheese Co.), museums (like the RSL Museum and the Ganmain Historical Museum) and the historic Up-to-Date Store Cultural Precinct.

Nature lovers can explore the local Kindra State Forest – a 520-hectare reserve featuring walking and biking trails where they can enjoy native flora and fauna.

Coolamon's strong sense of community is evident in its active local events, such as the Vintage Rail Journeys Riverina tours and the Marrar Campdraft. With affordable housing options, quality schools and excellent healthcare facilities, Coolamon has so much to offer to any new family.

For the Shaves, Coolamon offered them an opportunity they simply couldn't pass up. 'We chose Coolamon purely due to the fact that the beehives we purchased were in Coolamon, along with our mentor,' they explain. 'It just so happened that Coolamon turned out to be an ideal town to choose, with its close proximity to Wagga Wagga and a fairly central position in the Riverina providing access to a wide variety of local native and cultivated flora.'

'Natalie and I feel very fortunate that the community has been very welcoming and we've met some of the kindest people here in Coolamon,' says Joel.

Advice For Fellow Entrepreneurs

If you're considering a regional location, Natalie has these simple words of advice... "Don't think yourself out of it! Connect and engage with your local community, and don't be afraid to fail and adapt to changes."



The Murray River

When a Holiday Becomes Home

HOW JULIA'S TREE CHANGE IS HELPING SHAPE BAROOGA.



Julia has always loved driving change and serving others.

If you're a city-dweller, chances are, at some point, you've caught yourself daydreaming about leaving it all behind... moving to the country and inhaling that fresh air, quiet enough to hear the birds, clear enough to see the stars.

For most, this will remain a pipedream. But for Julia Cornwell McKean and her husband, it became their reality.

Love For The Country

'For years and years, my husband and I would travel to towns along the Murray [River] for holidays, primarily because of the wonderful weather and fresh air,' Julia explains. 'We particularly liked Barooga and Tocumwal, as they were a good deal more peaceful than some of the other tourist towns.'

One Sunday night, after spending yet another weekend in Barooga, Julia began browsing local real estate opportunities online. 'And the rest is history,' she says.

The pair decided to buy a small unit in beautiful Berrigan Shire. 'We thought we would come up once a month, but eventually, we found we were here every weekend and holiday. After a few years, we decided to downsize in Melbourne and upsize in Barooga, with the plan to eventually retire in Barooga.'

However, the move came much sooner than Julia expected.

COVID-19 Changing the Way We Do Business

As a business owner, Julia felt that a full-time life in the country may not be a realistic possibility for her. She needed services such as high-speed internet and mobile coverage, and was required to attend regular in-person business meetings.

'Internet and mobile coverage were a real challenge when we first bought our unit in Barooga and were only here on weekends,' says Julia. 'As both have improved immensely, it is now a real option to run a business like mine from home in Barooga.'

The pandemic also changed the way many of us do business. In the past, there was little flexibility around face-to-face meetings and working from home was considered a temporary solution, rather than a permanent state of affairs.

'Before the pandemic, I would attend business meetings in Melbourne during the week and come back to Barooga on a Thursday or Friday to spend the weekend. Since the pandemic, I have been able to run my business full-time from my home in Barooga, with nearly all of my meetings being virtual. It's what I always dreamed of doing, but would never imagine it happening in the way that it did.'

The Move to Mayor

Julia has always loved driving change and serving others. She has spent decades working with, in, and for the government, including the Australian Public Service and several international committees. Seven years ago, she made the move to become a public sector consultant.

When the pandemic began in 2020, Julia reached out to various local community groups to volunteer her help where needed. 'As the pandemic progressed, being a border town, Barooga really had a hard time,' she says. 'I got braver and started writing to Ministers about the impacts the border closures were having on our community.'

In May of that year, some local Berrigan Shire news spurred her into action. 'It was announced that the Barooga swimming pool would close for good,' explains Julia. 'I was devastated, as an avid swimmer and advocate of water safety. I sent out emails seeing if I could be of any help. I then led a campaign that successfully campaigned for Berrigan Shire and Moira Shire Councils to co-fund the operating loss of the pool with Sporties Barooga, the owners of the facility, for two years.'



That same year, Julia was asked if she would be interested in running for Council. She initially declined. 'However, when I was asked again in 2021, my answer changed, and I decided to run at the elections.'

After securing a position on the local Council, Julia decided she wouldn't stop there. In September 2023, Julia decided to run for Mayor. '[I] am very grateful that my fellow Councillors saw fit to elect me to that role,' she says.

'Being Mayor of a regional Council certainly has its challenges. Firstly, there is the inequity: health, education, infrastructure, digital connectivity. And then there is the issue of the cities making decisions without considering how they impact on small communities such as ours.'

Julia, the first Indigenous mayor in Berrigan Shire, and a Wiradjuri woman, has been advocating loudly for the community. 'And I believe that we have already made progress on some issues as a result,' she says. 'At a minimum, people are starting to ask who this pushy woman is!' she jokes.

Beautiful Berrigan Shire

Berrigan Shire is certainly worth advocating for. Located north of the Murray River, it sits in the Murray region of NSW, close to the Victorian border.

The area boasts stunning weather, impressive natural features and, of course, that famous country warmth and hospitality. 'The community has been great,' says Julia. 'Every morning I go to the swimming pool and gym, and then I walk to the coffee shop. Every person I pass says "Good morning", whether I know them or not. I think that is just lovely.'

“Julia, the first Indigenous mayor in Berrigan Shire, and a Wiradjuri woman, has been advocating loudly for the community.”

Perhaps it's true what they say about sunshine boosting serotonin levels. Berrigan Shire, in combination with Moira Shire, is known as 'Sun Country on the Murray', thanks to its surplus of sunshine year-round.

Of course, the sunshine is also a blessing for the crops, sheep, and cattle that inhabit a significant portion of the area's irrigated farmland. A day on the Murray Farm Gate Trail will give you all the delicious evidence you need.

The great outdoors beckons here – from river activities and water sports to birdwatching, golf (the Tocumwal Golf & Bowls Club will even host the PGA Associates Championship through 2027!) and nature trails for bushwalks and mountain bike adventures.

But don't let that fool you into thinking it's all about nature. The Shire is dotted with charming historic buildings and cafes.

Advice for anyone considering a tree change

'When I return to Melbourne from time to time, I wonder for a minute or two why I left. But it doesn't takelong when I encounter traffic, crowds and allergies that I realise where my heart is.'



Capturing the Beauty and Love of the Past in Cootamundra

HOW CHILDHOOD SWEETHEARTS REUNITED AFTER THREE
DECADES, AND OPENED THEIR DREAM BUSINESS

The past has a funny way of weaving itself into Sarah Van Dyke's and Andrew Ormond's lives.

First childhood sweethearts were reunited 35 years after losing touch. Then Sarah found herself moving back to the country town where she was raised, chatting with locals who had known her family for decades.

And now, they've opened a vintage store, tea room and community hub within the delicate bones of the very first shop to open in Cootamundra back in 1861.

From the freshly baked bread to the black-and-white flooring, The Olde General Store is a nostalgic nod to the charms of the past. 'We opened the store with only a few shelves of [pet] treats and the idea of a "general store" vibe where people could meet, chat and learn a little bit about forgotten skills and ideals,' explains Sarah. 'Very quickly, the shop grew into the quirky, vintage, step-back-in-time space that it is today; it's always evolving.

'We teach sourdough making, traditional soap making, our meals are homemade and generous, organic teas are served in pots, and tables are dressed with lace tablecloths. We run High Teas regularly – we make everything in-house.

'Our store brings people in from all over the Riverina, and some even from Canberra and Sydney. We hope that we can provide locals and visitors a unique experience that they can't find anywhere else.'

Cootamundra has indeed been the perfect location to launch this sweet business. As a professional photographer with a thriving clientele in Sydney, Sarah knew she didn't want to build her network again when she moved back to Cootamundra.

Instead, she focused on the online pet treat store she and Andrew had launched. 'We had started The Treat Jar during COVID, and it took off – right place, right time kind of thing,' she says.

'When we moved to Coota, we needed a large working kitchen ... and found a large shop which was once the very popular Fong Fong Chinese Restaurant. The Council required that we had the shopfront open at least one day a week as it's in the main street.' So the pair opened their store with just a few shelves' worth of stock.

Their business soon began to evolve in response to what they found their customers wanted. Sarah and Andrew moved away from the online store and labour-intensive pet treats to focus their attention on other aspects of the multi-pronged business.

And the rest, as they say, is history.



“Our store brings people in from all over... We hope that we can provide a unique experience that they can't find anywhere else.”

The call of Cootamundra

When Sarah first moved away from the town with her mum and siblings at age 11, she couldn't have imagined that she would one day be an important part of Cootamundra's small-business scene.

But when the couple needed to leave the Blue Mountains and make a snap decision on their new location – Cootamundra was the clear winner.

'We needed to move fast and so going somewhere we already knew where we had extended family was important, as both of our mothers still live in the area,' explains Sarah. It also made sense to move closer to Andrew's work in Temora.

'We chose Coota because we knew it well – the demographic, the people, the needs and wants.'

Indeed, both Sarah and Andrew grew up together in the town. 'Andy and I were childhood sweethearts – we were inseparable from the moment we met when we were around six years old to the moment I left Coota aged 11,' explains Sarah.

Despite returning to Cootamundra every school holidays to visit her father, who was Cootamundra's GP for 30 years, Andy and Sarah lost touch. 'Strangely, we didn't come across each other again for 35 years!'

So fate stepped in. Four years ago, Sarah returned to Cootamundra to conduct a photographic study on women. 'I interviewed and photographed Andy's mum – and sitting at that kitchen table, surrounded by all those photos, I had the urge to get in touch with Andy,' she says.



And when she did, it was love at second sight. The pair took up right where they left off.

'Andy and I were married in a simple ceremony in our own backyard in August. Funny how things seem to have a way of working out. The town is quite invested in our love story!'

When they first opened their store, the lovebirds were quite the novelty in Cootamundra. The locals would come in droves with stories of their parents and families. 'It took a while for us to settle into the community as Sarah and Andy, rather than our parents' children,' she says. But the couple has now made many new friends across all walks of life. 'We have been embraced by the community so well, it's almost like we never lived anywhere else.'

Funny how things seem to have a way of working out. The town is quite invested in our love story!

All change brings challenge

The newlyweds are loving life in their small country town, from being able to spend more time together to having the space to breed chickens.

'The move has been great; the only real negative is the distance from our own kids,' says Sarah. 'Andy's children live up in North Queensland, while my oldest daughter and her new little family live in Sydney. My younger daughter followed us and now lives in Junee, while my son is in Boorowa.'

Sarah says, 'Overall, it's been a positive move. But there are definitely challenges.'

Life in Cootamundra

There's a lot to love about Cootamundra. The picturesque town's tree-lined, fairy-lit streets, quirky boutiques and stunning seasonal scenery look straight out of a movie set – perfect for Sarah and Andrew's cinematic romance.

Its rolling hills turn golden in September when the canola and wheat take off, the vast open spaces fill with ambient fog come winter. Those who love getting active can take advantage of mountain biking and walking trails, spacious parks and the town's passion for cricket.

Those who enjoy the finer things will enjoy the local food scene, from locally roasted coffee to sourdough making at The Olde General Store. And those looking to follow in Sarah's footsteps can take advantage of lower business overheads compared to urban centres.

Local events also bring the community together, from the Cootamundra Picnic Races and Wallendbeen Long Lunch, to the Wattle Time Festival and Cootamundra Show.

Considering a country change?

If you think life in a small town would suit you, Cootamundra could be the place for you.

Sarah's advice? 'Just do it! Seriously, though, living in Country NSW is amazing. Throw yourself into the community, you will get back double of what you put in.'



Raising a Family in Hay Shire

RICH IN HISTORY AND SENSE OF SPIRIT,
HAY SHIRE IS A JEWEL IN THE ROUGH.



The region may boast the flattest plains in the southern hemisphere, but Hay Shire is anything but monotonous. Buzzing with friendly locals, heritage buildings and a shared passion for sports, this LGA sits proudly in the Riverina.

And James and Kate Moran wouldn't want to live anywhere else.

Hay Shire – an easy choice

James was living in Botany, Sydney and Kate grew up in Point Lonsdale, Victoria. Though the couple grew up in different states, they eventually found each other and fell in love. It was James who first dipped his toes into teaching in regional Australia. He'd been told about the plentiful work opportunities available in Broken Hill and enjoyed a short three-month stint working in the area in 2016 before travelling through Europe with Kate for the remainder of the year.

When they returned, they wanted to return to regional New South Wales, and Hay Shire was the easy choice.

As the manager of Wilcannia-Forbes AFL since 2018, James has attended multiple diocesan trials in Hay, long before moving to the area. 'From my first time coming here, the beauty of the town and the river grabbed me, I fell in love with the place!' he says. 'I was keeping an eye out for the principal's job in Hay, so when it came up I knew it would be somewhere we'd love to live.'

So, the couple decided to raise their baby son Lachie in Hay Shire, where James fills the role of school principal of St Mary's Parish Primary School, and high school teacher Kate is currently on maternity leave.

“From my first time coming here, the beauty of the town and the river grabbed me, I fell in love with the place!”

'We're excited for Lachie to grow up in such a welcoming town and get into sports,' explains James. 'We can't wait for him to play footy, swim in the pool and the river, and even give other sports a go, like tennis and athletics. We'll need to get a sturdier boat to teach him to fish in!'

A regional adventure

Moving to Hay Shire was an easy choice, but it did take some time. Upon their return from overseas, James and Kat first decided to head to Broken Hill together. 'Like James, I was looking for somewhere different to start my teaching career,' explains Kate. 'We decided on Broken Hill and ended up spending six amazing years out there.'

'I have family in the Northern Rivers, and moving to the country is something I've always wanted to do,' says James. 'I loved growing up in Sydney and enjoy going back to see my friends, but the slower lifestyle of the country and the cheaper cost of living were big factors.' And he doesn't regret any of it. 'I loved every minute of the adventure. Then, in 2023, the job came up in Hay at St Mary's Parish Primary School, I applied and was successful!'

Kate is also grateful their careers led them to Hay. 'I'm enjoying Hay just as much [as Broken Hill],' she says. 'It's closer to home for both of us and is such a great location to start our family.'

It's also the perfect place for teaching. 'Regional schools are brilliant,' explains James. 'You're able to get to know each student and family, and form relationships with them. St Mary's is a brilliant school, but it was in need of a rebuild after a few tough years.'

'The community is so welcoming, and it's a brilliant place where every student and family is valued, and we're able to have a lot of fun! The children see you out and about in town, particularly at local sport, and they're polite and always say hello.'

The role of principal can be demanding and time-consuming, which makes James even more glad to be living in a regional town. 'As a principal, it can be tough as it's a busy job. But living in Hay means I'm not fighting traffic or a commute each day. We're able to get up early and walk the dog – even though it can be cold in winter! – get organised and still be at work early. Even when the workday is late, you can be home with plenty of time left for sports, training or family time.'

A town built on community

'[Community] is perhaps Hay's biggest asset,' says James. 'The people have been incredible. From day one, everyone introduced themselves and made us welcome. It made learning so many new names hard! I think the locals really respect those who invest in the town and want to make Hay a great place, like we do.'

The couple also appreciates the many opportunities for young people in the town. 'There are many community groups that are invested in providing learning opportunities to young people and want them involved, whether it be the RSL, various environmental groups or the local paper,' says James. 'The community cherishes its youngest citizens.'

James and Kate have also relished the town's love of sports, getting involved in netball, footy and water skiing, among others. They love taking their tinny out to fish for Murray Cod, and walking the river trail with Lachie and their dog, Ned.

'While we knew (hoped!) we'd love it, we settled in so much faster than we thought!'

Regional living

While James and Kate had expected a few challenges living in a regional town, they've found that most have come with a silver lining. Having to travel for airport and maternity services have become an excuse for a day trip. Concerns about a lack of shopping facilities were also unwarranted. 'You can buy nearly everything in town from the supermarkets, butcher and other stores. It hasn't been an issue at all.'

The housing situation in Hay meant the pair did spend two years looking, but they've finally found the perfect home. 'We've just bought a place near the pool and move in January!' says James.

Affordability has been a major bonus. 'We get to travel, save money and don't miss out on anything as we aren't paying city prices.'



“While we knew (hoped!) we'd love it, we settled in so much faster than we thought!”

Hay hay, what a beautiful place to stay

With a population just shy of 3000 residents, Hay Shire is a well-kept secret. This gorgeous LGA sits in the Riverina Region of south-west NSW. Located in the middle of Hay Plains, it boasts a rich history, including five museums and an art trail nestled on the banks of the Murrumbidgee River. This means you can spend time on the river participating in the Hay Fishing Classic, enjoy traditional “smoko” at Shear Outback museum and spend a long afternoon exploring the bike trails that weave their way through the town.

Known for its Merino sheep and wool industry (there's even a Hay Merino Sheep Show each year!), as well as rice, corn and wheat crops, the region is well-placed between Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne and Adelaide. The Hay Plains offers one of the most unique landscapes in Australia, as well.

Hay's many museums and its yearly rodeos are an indication of the pride it takes in its historical roots. This sense of community spirit can also be evidenced on the sports fields, where you might just spot James and Kate!

Advice for others considering a country change

'You'll never regret it!' says James. 'If you want your children to grow up in a welcoming community, surrounded by genuine people, Hay is the place to be!'



© Ethan M James

Kortmar Manor: A Dream Journey in Barmedman

HOW A FORMER SCHOOLHOUSE BECAME A VIBRANT HOME, BOUTIQUE RETREAT, AND HAVEN FOR SHIBA INU LOVERS.

What started as a simple conversation about “working less in our 50s” became the spark that set Simon Kleyn and Lyne Browning on an adventure they could never have planned.

In 2016, they purchased the former St Brendan’s Catholic Primary School in the small village of Barmedman, and by 2018, they had moved in full-time. Few people who knew the school in its earlier days could have imagined its transformation into Kortmar Manor—an elegant family home with beautiful formal gardens, tastefully renovated guest rooms, and an extensive playground for the spirited Shiba Inu dogs of **Kortmar Shiba Inu**—a little taste of Japan right in the Riverina.

“We didn’t pick Barmedman,” Lyne says. “We really just stumbled across the property. We think the building picked us, and the location came along as part of the package.”



Creating Kortmar Manor

Their wish list was simple: a structurally sound brick house, a block big enough for the dogs but not too big (ideally half an acre to three acres), and town amenities like water, sewerage, and rubbish collection.

After years on a five-acre property with tank/bore water and septic, they hit the jackpot at 15 Queen Street. “We even scored better internet and faster deliveries with online shopping!” Lyne laughs.

The idea of paid guest accommodation came later. “We thought several small income streams we could do from home on our own terms was an alternative to either of us working full time,” Lyne explains. “If the accommodation didn’t work out, we’d still have lovely, quality spaces for our family and friends.”

Hospitality with Character

Today, Kortmar Manor offers boutique guest rooms for travellers, cyclists, and those visiting the nearby Barmedman Mineral Pool. Guests can enjoy the quiet charm of village life from the front verandah—especially during harvest, when mighty machinery rumbles past, or in the evenings as the sun dips behind the silos, painting the sky in golden hues.

They’ve worked around limited local dining options by offering pre-prepared frozen meals, Seven Miles barista coffee, and homemade muffins and scones. Plans are in place for morning teas in their gardens in the warmer months.

“We think the building picked us, and the location came along as part of the package.”

The Serendipity of Finding Home

Simon and Lyne’s move was inspired in part by Lyne’s mum, who had settled in Holbrook. “We were really impressed with her life there,” Lyne says. “Seeing how much further the property dollar would go in a regional area prompted us to start actively discussing retirement options and have realistic conversations about how much money we’d really need to live and how much better our work/life balance could be.”

With their youngest child finishing high school, they wanted to create something together. Holbrook was their first choice, but local council restrictions on dog numbers meant they had to keep looking.

When they first walked into St Brendans, the decision was made almost instantly. “It was 25 metres long, double brick throughout, 14-foot ceilings, original cypress pine floors—and such promise and opportunity for us to create something truly impressive together. We made an offer that day and exchanged on the property before the week was out.”

“The space felt good to be in—welcoming, solid, with a sense of history and purpose,” Simon says. “A building that means something from the memories of the past and its continued purpose into the future.”



“It’s a very special treat for Shiba lovers. It’s something we can share with others who adore them as much as we do.”

For dog lovers, Kortmar Manor offers something truly unique—**Shiba Stay & Play** experiences. Guests can immerse themselves in all things Shiba, with fully catered options available.

“It’s a very special treat for Shiba lovers,” Lyne says. “It’s something we can share with others who adore them as much as we do.”

Life in the Bland Shire: Community and Opportunity

One surprise has been the abundance of jobs in the surrounding towns. “There’s more here than we expected,” Simon says. “Bland Shire Council has been great to work with—we really appreciate the support they provide to local small businesses and new residents.”

While Barmedman itself is small, Temora and West Wyalong are just 30km away, and almost anything else is just an online order away.

The towns and villages of the Bland Shire—Barmedman, Kikoira, Mirrool, Naradhan, Tallimba, Ungarie and Weethalle—paint a vivid picture of rich history, natural beauty, and well-preserved heritage.



West Wyalong, the primary town, sits at the crossroads of the Mid-Western and Newell Highways, making it a hub of connectivity. With a population of 5,487 and a median house price of just \$299,000, the Shire offers newcomers a warm welcome, a slower pace, and room to make their dreams a reality.

“In these days of busy lifestyles and everyone competing for resources, what we do have out here is space, time, and room—space to move, time to think, and room to breathe,” Lyne says. “It’s good for the soul, and nothing is something.”

For Simon and Lyne, the move to Bland Shire wasn’t just about finding a house—it was about embracing possibility.

“We’re the type of people who prepare for the worst and hope for the best,” Lyne says. “We’ve found far more positive support than we ever imagined.”

And as Kortmar Manor continues to grow and welcome guests, it stands as proof of what can happen when you follow an idea—not knowing exactly where it will lead, but willing to participate in the journey.

If you’d like to learn more about staying at Kortmar Manor—or perhaps planning your own Country Change—visit www.kortmar.com or the Kortmar Manor Facebook page.



Family, Business, and Community

JARED AND AMY WALKER'S JOURNEY TO LOCKHART SHIRE

A New Chapter in Lockhart Shire

When Jared and Amy Walker made the bold decision to leave the corporate world behind and purchase a butcher shop in Lockhart Shire, they were seeking more than just a business opportunity. They were looking for a new lifestyle—a slower pace, closer community ties, and the chance to work together as a family. Jared's story is a perfect example of the power of country life, entrepreneurship, and building a family business in a tight-knit community.

From the Corporate World to Butcher Shop Owners

Jared's journey started in the bustling world of corporate banking, where he was climbing the ladder at one of Australia's biggest banks. However, he was growing disillusioned with the corporate grind. Despite his career success, Jared felt disconnected from customers and yearned for a more meaningful job that could impact people's lives.

"I wasn't connecting with the customers like I used to when I was an apprentice butcher," Jared recalls. This realisation sparked a desire to return to his roots—his passion for butchering—and led him to reconsider his career path. With his wife, Amy, they decided to explore a new chapter by moving to Lockhart Shire.

Why Lockhart Shire?

Lockhart Shire wasn't initially on their radar. Jared and Amy had heard of the town through family connections, but it wasn't until a chance visit to the area that they began to see the potential. "We went out to Lockhart, and as soon as we arrived, we saw kids riding bikes down the main street, people walking their dogs—everyone was so welcoming," Jared recalls. The beauty of the town, coupled with the friendliness of the locals, made a lasting impression.

"Lockhart just seemed like the perfect place," he adds. The couple found a butcher shop for sale in the heart of the town—an opportunity that felt right. "We walked into this little butcher shop, and it just screamed 'husband and wife, let's do this.' Nothing to lose," he says.

The couple's decision to purchase the shop wasn't without its challenges, but their shared passion for running a business and being a part of the community made it feel like the right move. They made the purchase and began their new life as small business owners in Lockhart Shire.

Community Support and Family Life

One of the most significant benefits of moving to Lockhart Shire has been the overwhelming support from the local community. Jared explains, "The community here is so supportive. In a small town like Lockhart, people genuinely care about each other's success. They want to know you and your family. They want to see you thrive."

In Lockhart, Jared and Amy didn't just find customers—they found friends. "You can walk down the street, and people will stop you to say, 'Hey, how are you doing? What are you up to?'" Jared says. This warm reception has been a key part of the couple's journey as they grew their business and their family. The sense of belonging and mutual support is something they hadn't anticipated but have grown to appreciate deeply.

In addition to the business, raising their children in Lockhart Shire has been a fulfilling experience. "The pace of life here allows us to spend so much more time together as a family," says Jared. "It's one of the reasons we chose this lifestyle—we wanted to be able to give our kids more, not just materially, but in terms of time and connection."

"In a small town like Lockhart, people genuinely care about each other's success. They want to know you and your family. They want to see you thrive."

The Business Journey: Adapting and Thriving

While the transition to small business ownership in a country town wasn't without its hurdles, Jared and Amy's commitment to quality and community has paid off. Their butcher shop, now known as "That Butcher Shop," offers more than just traditional butcher services. They've built a reputation for providing high-quality meats, fresh cuts, and innovative offerings like grazing boards and pre-packaged meat for busy families.

One of the most rewarding aspects of running their business is the chance to mentor young people in the community. Jared proudly shares that his employees, some as young as 16, are entrusted with important responsibilities, such as managing the shop during the afternoons. "We want to teach them life skills that they might not learn elsewhere, and they have responded so well. We want to be a part of their journey, just like the mentors who helped us."



Entrepreneurship in Lockhart: A Unique Opportunity

What sets Lockhart Shire apart from larger urban areas is the sense of opportunity that comes with a low-overhead, high-reward business environment. "In a big city, you could invest your savings into a business and not see any return," Jared explains. "But in Lockhart, there's a real chance to build something special because the community is behind you. They want you to succeed."

Jared's experience is a testament to the power of taking risks in a supportive environment. While his initial goal was to climb the corporate ladder in a big city, the Riverina's lifestyle and opportunities changed his course. "What we've built in Lockhart isn't just a business, it's a family. Our customers feel that. They see our kids playing in front of the shop, and it makes them feel connected to us," he says.

The success of their butcher shop is also due to the relationship Jared and Amy have fostered with the local council. "The support from the council has been amazing. They helped us navigate the challenges of starting a business in a small town, and even helped promote our products at regional events," says Jared. Their success has led to recognition, including national awards for their small goods, which Jared proudly displays in the shop.

In May 2025, That Butcher Shop also achieved international acclaim, taking home top honours at the 2025 IFFA DFV Quality International Competition in Frankfurt, Germany — the world's premier event for smallgoods producers. Representing Australia among a powerhouse contingent that submitted 331 products, the Riverina favourite earned a Gold Medal for its Traditional Bacon, a second Gold for its Chilli Beer Stix, and a Bronze for its Aussie Hotdog!



The Future: Building a Legacy

Looking ahead, Jared and Amy plan to continue growing their business while maintaining their strong family ties. "We're not looking to expand beyond Lockhart. This is where we want to be. We're building something that will last, not just for us, but for our kids and the community."

While they have plans for the future, Jared and Amy's focus remains on maintaining the quality of their products and being an integral part of the Lockhart community. "For us, it's not just about business success. It's about being a family, running a quality shop, and giving back to the community that has supported us every step of the way."

A Family-Focused Business in Lockhart Shire

Jared and Amy Walker's story is one of risk, reward, and the power of family. Their move to Lockhart Shire wasn't just about starting a business—it was about creating a life that allowed them to be present with their children, build strong community relationships, and contribute to the local economy. Their story is a powerful reminder that country living offers more than just space—it offers connection, opportunity, and a chance to make a meaningful impact.

If you're considering a move to a regional area, Lockhart Shire offers a wealth of opportunities and a supportive community, just like the Walkers experienced. Take a step toward a brighter future and discover what this unique region has to offer. Reach out to us for more information about a Country Change to Lockhart Shire.



Family of Six Discovers Fresh Opportunities in the Riverina

EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND WORK/LIFE BALANCE –
THIS FAMILY HAS FOUND IT ALL IN COLEAMBALLY.

Like many city folk, the Sipou family once wondered if country life was for them. But they quickly discovered that life in Coleambally, which sits in the Murrumbidgee Council area, was full of incredible rewards and brimming with opportunity.

Brent and Kayla not only secured fulfilling jobs, but also found themselves more connected than ever to a warm, welcoming community.

The Search for Affordable Housing

The current cost of living has many Aussie families feeling pinched right now. For the Sipous, it was the lack of affordable housing in Sydney that prompted them to look further afield.

'We'd been in our home for over five years when the owner contacted us wanting to raise the rent \$200 a week,' explains Kayla. 'We'd just been through a lot of medical issues with our youngest daughter and our family was stressed and, at points, disconnected.'

'We'd wanted to move to the country for a while but with us both growing up in the city, we didn't know where to start. And having four young kids, it was a little daunting!'

'The day after we received the notice of the rent increase, we sat down and spoke about it. We were being locked out of Sydney and would've had to move the kids to new schools and daycares to find affordable housing.'

'So we made the decision that it was time to just follow our hearts and take the leap!'

But the next decision to make was where to move to. 'Brent and I figured if we were going to move somewhere so far away from our friends and family, that we should move somewhere where we at least knew one person,' says Kayla.

Although the family had never visited Coleambally, Kayla's cousin had settled in the town and was due to give birth to her first baby. 'I really wanted to be a part of her life for that.'

So they made what would turn out to be the best decision for their young family and in September 2023, Brent, Kayla and their four young children moved from Holsworthy in Sydney to Coleambally in the Riverina.

The Misconceptions of Country Life

The Sipou family didn't know what to expect from their new town, but they knew country life would be very different to the city hustle.

'We had no idea what it would be like, we just knew it would be different!' Kayla says. 'I think we thought it would be more isolating than it is and that there wouldn't be much opportunity for work – but we've found the complete opposite!'

She says the small size of Coleambally – its headcount at the 2021 Census was 1,152 – had them worried about employment. 'I originally thought country towns were low on work – especially somewhere like Coleambally that is so small. But almost the week we moved here, both Brent and myself were finding the complete opposite. There were amazing opportunities.'

Kayla found work at a popular restaurant in town but soon craved more consistency and found employment with CIA Tyre Service.

'Brent was originally a stay-at-home dad but since all of our children now attend school and preschool, he also works at CIA Tyre Service. I think the customer-focused roles have given us a great experience with meeting the local community and a great introduction to Coleambally.'

The family also appreciates that employers in the area offer better work/life balance. 'I've found that in Coleambally, the family/work balance is much more understood than Sydney,' Kayla says.

'Employers understand down here that your children come first and you seem to be not just another number. The only downside is there are limited care options for holidays and after-school hours.'

But on the flipside, you'll typically find lower daycare rates. 'In Sydney, we'd never have had the opportunity for both my husband and I to work due to the prices of Sydney daycare, housing and necessities. By lowering our expenses down here, it's made us both returning to work worth it.'

Employers understand down here that your children come first and you seem to be not just another number.

Embraced by the Coleambally Community

But the Sipou's found that one stereotype of country life was true: the hospitality and warmth.

'The community has been amazing! We've been welcomed with open arms,' says Kayla. 'The local mothers' group was a great start and being present at the kids' school activities has helped also. The kids are involved in the local football club too, so we have a lot of exposure to the community.'

'We've found that's one of the most humbling things about Coleambally: that everyone knows everyone and welcomes you with open arms!'

Getting involved with the community through volunteering has certainly helped. 'We try and get involved where possible,' explains Kayla. 'Within the first few months of being here, I put my hand up to volunteer for the Coleambally Preschool committee and am now the President. And Brent is playing for the Darlington Point Coleambally Roosters.'

'Moving to Coleambally has changed our lives for the better and we'll forever be thankful for the opportunities we've been given here.'

Sharing the Coly love

Naturally the family have missed some aspects of city life, with Kayla saying, 'About the three-month mark, we found the hype of the move had worn off and the kids really missed Sydney.' But it wasn't long until they brought Sydney (at least part of it) to them!

'In Sydney, we were very close with the Hallard family, who consist of Tegan, Nathan and their five children, so when we decided to make the big move two weeks after their daughter was born, we really felt the struggle being apart!'

We had been here for three months when we invited them down to stay with us, and after spending two weeks during the January school holidays with us, they agreed that Coleambally was the place they wanted to raise their children and get ahead in life.

Within the space of three weeks, we had found them a farmhouse (only four minutes up the road from us) and had secured them work in the community! We are now back to being one (big) happy, friend family! Our children catch the bus back to their house after school for play dates, we cheer on our kids at the football games each weekend and they are just as in love with their new life as we are!'

It's no wonder Kayla and Brent say their tree change has been 'the best decision we ever made'.



Life in The Riverina

Coleambally is one of the youngest towns in NSW, officially opening in June 1968. This small Riverina town is part of the Murrumbidgee Council area and was created to act as the hub of the Coleambally Irrigation Area.

In addition to its agricultural enterprises, Coleambally also boasts plenty of untouched natural attractions. It is home to walking trails, outdoor sculptures, and incredible flora and fauna, including some severely endangered species.

Sport plays a big role in the area as well (such as netball, football, cricket and tennis) and has a fantastic sports precinct. And, as Kayla says, '[Coleambally] really has that community spirit!' Popular events include Taste Coleambally – Food and Farm Festival and the Warangesda Festival, featuring some of the best First Nations art, music, storytelling, dance and culture.

Advice for anyone considering a tree change

'If you want the change, do it! There isn't going to be a "right time" – you won't know until you do it! Take the leap and just do it! You have no idea what you're missing!'

Time to consider a tree change? Visit the Country Change Town Page or contact us for more information, we would love to help you!

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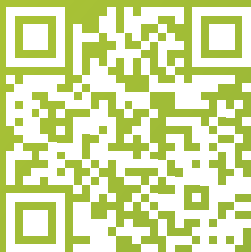
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