

# Heyday of Mayday takes trip down memory lane

By CORAL COOKSLEY

An event with a focus on Mayday Hills Mental Hospital sparked special memories of a medical rotation more than 40 years ago for paediatric surgeon Paddy Dewan.

Dr Dewan was among a 70-strong crowd drawn to the 'Heyday of Mayday' fundraiser held at the end of last month by the Friends of the Burke Museum (FOBM).

The event highlighted the significance of the hospital's impact on the Beechworth community.

"I came back to Wangaratta as a second-year resident at Wangaratta Hospital in 1981 and part of the job of being appointed at the Hospital was a three-month rotation to the Mayday Hills Mental Hospital," Dr Dewan said.

Three guest speakers Sandra Davidson, Max Wellstead and Michael Evans had the ears of a captivated audience.

Former staff members; Ms Davidson a social worker, Dr Max Wellstead a psychiatrist and Mr Evans a psychiatric services manager for then known Department of Human Services in the Hume region - delivered fascinating perspectives of the medical facility shut in 1995.

Dr Dewan said he worked with Mr Wellstead in the clinic learning psychiatry as a junior doctor.

"I think it taught me to connect more to people, rather than just treat the illness," he said.

Dr Dewan said significant medical diagnoses had been made as well as improving the physical health of patients too.

"I went away feeling as if I'd worked with someone who was going to change the way I practice medicine being taught some psychiatry and I really enjoyed the time there," he said.

"It's been a wonderful initiative to look in detail at the history of such an important institution in the town.

"There's more work that can be done to further connect with the history and what might come out of mental illness management.

"Art therapy was being used too, and I have a drawing by one of the patients as a piece of memorabilia.

"It's a captivating image and is one of my prized possessions because it's just such a captivating image, and that connection to art and mental well-being."

Beechworth Bendigo Bank board chair Ben Merritt said community groups telling stories about what's happened in the community through education keeps narratives alive for the future.

"I've always thought of the Beechworth asylum as being the 1880s but there's so much interesting history there which I've heard about today until its closure in 1995," he said.

A former Mayday Hills Mental Hospital psychiatric nurse, Beechworth's Lindsay Rankin said he had a wonderful career at the hospital.

"I did my nurse training here as a student nurse and finished my career as an area Mental Health manager," he said.

Mr Rankin said he arrived at the hospital in 1966 and retired in 1999.

Over that time among positions held included deputy in-charge nurse and an acting director of nursing.

"When we mainstreamed, I was one of the people who were in charge of mental health services from the Wodonga hospital, and I became an executive director of psychiatry there," he said.

FOBM president Kate Sutherland said people drawn to the event also telling interesting stories has prompted the committee to hold a similar event next year.



CONTRIBUTED: Friends of the Burke Museum (FOBM) committee member Daniel Goonan (left), Beechworth Bendigo Bank board chair Ben Merritt, presenter Dandra Davidson, FOBM president Dr Kate Suitherland, presenters Michael Evans and local poet Frank Prem at the Mayday Hills event.

PHOTO: Coral Cooksley



MEMORIES: Beechworth's Lindsay Rankin (left), Max Wellstead with Gianni D'Otenzio and Paddy Dewan who had trained together at the former Mayday Hills Mental Hospital.

PHOTO: Coral Cooksley



STORY: One of three guest speakers Beechworth's Michael Evans delivered a fascinating account of the Beechworth Mental Hospital's closure at the Mayday Hill event.

PHOTO: Gary Coombe.

lar event next year.

"Many people who came along had some connection with Mayday Hills working there themselves or their parents," she said.

"The hospital forms such an integral part of Beechworth community that people have a great sense of an attachment to Mayday Hills."

Beechworth poet Frank Prem told stories through his poetry.

Mr Prem's connections to Mayday Hills began with his parent s working there in the 1960s.

"Mum was on the nursing staff, and my dad was on the artisan staff working in the kitchens," he said.

Mr Prem said he became a student psychiatric nurse undertaking three years

of training in various wards before heading to Melbourne.

Mr Evans said he spoke about reasons for closure with the drive to shut not having a lot to do with Mayday Hills itself but wrapped around broader changes in attitudes and changed expectations about how people with mental illness and intellectual disability should be treated.

"Beechworth has a long history of caring for people who no one else wanted to care for here," he said.

"Some of the positives that came out about people's experiences is worth remembering,"

## Man hospitalised after truck crash at Browns Plains

By BAILEY ZIMMERMANN

A man was seriously injured following a truck crash on the Murray Valley Highway at Browns Plains Wednesday morning.

An Ambulance Victoria spokesperson said Advanced Life Support and Mobile Intensive Care Ambulance paramedics attended the scene near the Chiltern-Howlong Road intersection just before 11:30am.

A man in his 20s was

treated for serious lower body injuries and taken to Albury Base Hospital in stable condition.

The Department of Transport and Planning issued a traffic alert advising motorists the highway was closed between Chiltern-Howlong Road and Barnawartha-Howlong Road.

Motorists were advised to avoid the area and detour around the site via Barnawartha-Howlong Road and Chiltern-Howlong Road.

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