



Montmorency Eltham RSL



Empathy Tradition Integrity Mateship Transparency Compassion Respect



2023 Annual Report

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RSL Victoria is a registered charity, member-based organisation and is the Victorian Branch of the Returned & Services League of Australia (RSL Australia).

First established in 1916, RSL Victoria's primary objectives are to provide support to veterans and their families, acknowledge Australian Defence Force service and perpetuate its patriotic duty whilst encouraging conversation and mateship between those who have served and their communities. A crucial role of the RSL is also to appropriately commemorate those who have suffered and died in service of our nation or its allies.

To achieve these objectives, RSL Victoria delivers a range of programs, services and initiatives directly and has 270 Sub-Branches throughout Victoria. Most major towns and suburbs across the state have an RSL Sub-Branch including those who have established significant facilities for local members and their communities.

Each year, throughout the state thousands of dedicated volunteers, over 170,000 members and many more Victorians directly support or participate in achieving the aims of RSL Victoria each year.

PRESIDENTS REPORT

Over the past year, I've had the distinct honour of leading our RSL, thanks in large to the exceptional quality of our management, staff, and committee. This leadership privilege is a rarity, one that many sub-branch Presidents may never encounter. The alternative, of course, is to lead with an overly scrutinizing eye, to micromanage club operations, to lack trust in the delegation process, and ultimately, to mistrust those you lead.

Not only have those overseeing our club's operations and our committee kept our establishment moving steadily forward over the past twelve months, but they've also placed our RSL in one of the most stable and financially positive positions it has seen in decades. It's for this reason, among many others, that I wish to dedicate this year's President's Report to them.



The remarkable transformation witnessed here since our last AGM isn't necessarily physical structure, but rather in the continuous stream of people through our doors, the upbeat atmosphere within our bistro and top bar, the camaraderie between staff, committee members, and patrons, and the profound connection to the community, fostered by the dedication, leadership, empathy, and professionalism of everyone associated with our RSL—whether as employees, volunteers, or patrons.



This year has been personally transformative for me in numerous ways. You may recall I woke up on Anzac Day in hospital, watching our Dawn Service via a live link, having sustained a minor leg injury during a charity boxing match. Despite the surgeon's instructions to refrain from going to the RSL, I couldn't resist the temptation. With my wife's assistance, I returned home, changed, and made my way in. Sitting in the Chesterfield Lounge, I reflected on the vital role our RSL plays in the community, humbled by the opportunity to pay respects to our fallen comrades among you all.

My career path led me to spend more time than usual in Canberra, navigating the bureaucratic landscape of the public service in various roles on behalf of the Department of Veterans Affairs. In late 2023, I was honoured with the title of Acting Repatriation Commissioner, tasked with administering the Veterans' Entitlements Act and serving as a part-time Member of the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Committee. While short-lived, this role was made possible by the unwavering support of Andrew Hall.

Andrew, not only worked tirelessly in his roles of Secretary and Vice President but seamlessly stepped into the presidency during my absence, continuing to drive exceptional outcomes for our RSL. It's Andrew's leadership, alongside Mark Hooky's professionalism, Tim Riely's dedication, and the willingness of our entire committee to pitch in wherever needed, that has helped propelled the Montmorency Eltham RSL to its current position.

Strategically, our plans remain consistent with those proposed last year, though our robust financial performance has accelerated progress on planned renovations and upgrades. Structural changes, enhancements to our venue, and functional improvements will enhance the ambiance and enable our staff to provide an even better experience for our growing patronage.



Crucially, we'll maintain our role as a community leader, engaging with schools to educate on Anzac themes and war history, and nurturing strong connections with local councils and state and federal politicians to ensure the memory of those who served is never forgotten.

There's much to be accomplished, much to be commemorated, and even more to be grateful for. Once again, I extend my deepest appreciation to everyone who contributes to making our RSL a place of work, volunteering, or simply a place to belong.

Glen Ferrarotto
President

Treasurers Report

The Treasurers role is very much assisted and guided by the commitment and professionalism of Libby Annet. Libby does a fantastic job for our RSL and her assistance to me in my role of Treasurer is immeasurable.

The Auditors McPhail & Partners have completed the audit of the accounts and completed financial reports for the three entities of the Montmorency Eltham RSL Sub-Branch. The audit will be made available on request and will be posted on our website.

Financially, the Club has performed extremely well this year as we see increased patronage through member engagement, functions and management initiatives. The surplus of \$130,244 was a near \$200k turnaround from 2022. This surplus could have been greater however, significant funds have been invested to modernise the club in a number of areas which included cash and accounting systems utilising current technology and gaming governance requirements.

MERSL Sub-Branch Inc Trading Account

A surplus of \$130,244 was returned compared to a loss of \$66,896 for 2022.

Total Member Funds (equity) retained earnings as of 31 December 2023 was \$1,598.656, up from \$1,468.412 in 2022.

MERSL Sub-Branch Inc Patriotic Fund

A net loss of \$23,362 for the year compared to a loss of \$18,648 for 2022.

Total Member Funds (equity) as of 31 December 23 was \$3,747,052, up from \$3,770.414 in 2022

MERSL Sub-Branch Inc General Appeals Fund

The amount of \$72,019 was raised Anzac Day and Remembrance Day Appeals. The Club retains 50% of this which is spent wholly on Veterans Welfare.

As of 31 December 2023, there was total equity of \$10, 820, down from \$11,688 in 2022.

Mark Hookey
Treasurer

Welfare and Advocacy Report



Veteran and veteran family support is one of the main roles of an RSL. Community support enables the Sub-Branch to be a community focused and a supportive organisation.

We continue to be proactive in reaching out to all Service Members either by visiting, by phone, mail or email. We believe reaching in also helps people reaching out.

The following is an overview on how the RSL has worked for veterans, families and the community:

- 🌿 Volunteer work for the benefit of Veterans and the Community in 2023 the total was 3386 hours which equates to \$163,983.98.
- 🌿 Welfare and Charitable expenses incurred by MERSL Trading Account totaled \$314,454 and include:
 - Support Kev Myers in his role as a DVA Advocate, a vitally important position proven by his many hours of work to Veterans from not just MERSL but around the state.
 - Donations of meals to needy Veterans, War Widows and Members of the RSL.
 - Isolated persons program.
 - Maintenance of Memorials.

- Room hire for community groups.
- Welfare Bus expenses.
- Vouchers for local groups to support their raffles.
- Physical and financial support in the way of garden maintenance for older Veterans and War Widows.
- Subsidised meals for older Veterans and Seniors to prevent social isolation.
- A bi-monthly Service Members and Partners dinner.
- A monthly Coffee Club for veterans.
- Sponsorship of four local cricket clubs and five local football clubs who deliver valuable work in running sporting organisations to promote health, competitiveness, and a sense of community. These Clubs have many existing members of the RSL and we have seen that the promotion of our brand and facility a return on the investment with future membership and participation within the RSL. This also provided Committee Members a chance to attend and discuss the RSL and its role in our local community.
- Support of the Montmorency Bowls Club.
- Support to the RSL Golf Club and Angling Club. Two vital Clubs that do valuable work volunteering for us.
- Continued contact with older Veterans and War Widows.
- Conduct of social activities like Bingo and Morning Melodies to assist in social interaction and participation.

- Members have participated in RSL Victoria's training in suicide awareness and prevention with the aim of identifying and assisting those in need.

There are so many people that sacrifice time and effort raising welfare funds. All the valued volunteers at appeal time, all sporting clubs that run raffles that support us, all staff who help sell welfare items and raffle tickets. Each and every person is a crucial part of the welfare program we have.

I am also very open to suggestions on other welfare ideas and activities we can investigate to improve our role.

Andrew Hall
Welfare Officer



Commemorations Report

It's been a very busy 12 months as usual with the Commemorations Team. We have had some great success with our services growing again and looking to continue to grow. We have tried installing some new methods with different levels of success, but all have proven beneficial to providing better services to our community.



One of the most notable things is the competitions we have initiated from both primary schools and secondary school. These have provided great engagement with the potential to create future members of our community and club. We will continue to pursue a greater level of involvement by our youth in our services and events. Please keep an eye out for these changes. As always we are looking to improve and shape our services so please provide us with feedback, both good and bad, and any ideas or visions you may have.

Our club's commemoration theme for this year will be the Voyager Collision, the 60th anniversary of that event. Our aim is to grant this event a greater level of attention, especially since we have two survivors from that event within our membership.

I would like to finish by thanking all those that have and continue to make our work possible. The Angling Club, Golf Club, members of Rotary and the staff of this Club especially.

Timothy Riley
Commemorations Officer.



Appeals Report

The Montmorency Eltham RSL was again a standout in the League with its work conducted with the ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day appeals.

With the passion and leadership from Hector Hart and Cait Chubb we again had a successful appeals year. There is so much behind the scenes work that goes into planning, preparation and conduct of the appeals program and the desire shown by all that support is truly inspirational.

We ask each year, and I will again now, that when the call to arms to volunteer for our appeals comes, please reach out and find some time to help. As major fundraisers these are critical and all hands make light work as they say, everyone that can please do.

We have also sourced many items of remembrance that are for sale at the RSL all year round. All funds go directly towards our welfare programs.

Andrew Hall
Appeals Officer

Memorabilia Report

The Memorabilia Group's primary role is to record, preserve and display the items which have been donated to the MERSL by members, family and local residents and which are related to military service, particularly if those items have some personal connection to the donor. Items from the wider public may also be accepted, but available storage space is becoming limited and our focus is to be a storage and display facility for members rather than a general 'military museum' for all items.

A secondary role of the Group is to enable members, and the public generally, to gain a greater awareness of our items of memorabilia, and their provenance.

Primary Role Details

In attending to the primary role, we have use of the online facility (Victorian Collections) provided by the Australian Museums and Galleries Association. This enables us to make a digital record of the details of all items displayed or stored. This online record is then available for public access (there are many other historical, sporting and educational institutions also using the 'VC' service). Attending that task is what takes up a significant amount of the Group's working time.

As well as having 'general' memorabilia items, we also have collected many books with a military theme, most of which are kept in our storeroom, because available space and security reasons limit what and where we can display books for others to browse or read more closely. As with the general items, the books have also been catalogued and we are in the process of tagging each book with a code number for easy retrieval and re-storage. We hope that we will soon be able to devise a way whereby members can more easily ascertain the contents of the collection and gain access to it.



Secondary Role Details

For many years, members have been able to view a large portion of our collection via the 6 display cabinets and various other displays (uniforms, framed prints, etc) in the Memorabilia Room and other places within the premises.

From time to time, the Group also organizes 'in-house' display afternoons and the like, during which a large number of items are spread across many tables for closer inspection by members and locals.

Regularly throughout the year, some of our Group (particularly Peter Randle, with the help of others) also put together a display specifically for school groups from our local schools.

Over recent months and in an effort to provide an alternative way for members and the wider community to become aware of our collection, we have established a second website which exists 'alongside' the main MERSL website (thanks to Maddy for assisting in this process). Each site contains cross-reference links to the other. Our new one is primarily to highlight some of the items of interest in our collection, but it also contains a section outlining the history of the Sub Branch, and another section describes some of the activities conducted within the club. This latter is available for use by the various groups within the overall club to announce upcoming events or to record something about events past, and so on.

Some Specific Activities During the Year

1) The Roll of Honour Board

After the winding up of the Eltham War Memorial Trust (which funded the making of the Board during the 1950s) in the mid 1960s, its assets were handed over to the Council. After a number of changes in location and custodianship since then, the Board was most recently kept in our memorabilia storeroom. During the first half of 2023, the Nillumbik Council worked with us to have the Board hung in the internal entrance to the Eltham Library. The Board records the names of Eltham residents who paid the ultimate sacrifice in WW1 and WW2.

We are also working with the Nillumbik Council to place a number of our items in a display cabinet (bought for us by the Council) beneath that Honour Board, as another way of making the public aware of the range of items which we take care of.



2) Des Nicholson's Photo Albums

In the second half of 2023, we were contacted by a relative of a soldier (Des Nicholson) who lived in Eltham for over 50 years (near the current Eltham North sporting facilities) and who enlisted in WW2, travelling overseas to serve mainly in the Middle East. After Des died in the early 2000s, his niece (Sally Ann, who lives in Coburg) was tidying up his belongings and found two photo albums which recorded sights connected to some of the places he visited and the mates he served with during his time away from Australia. Sally Ann contacted us, being the closest RSL to where he lived (the Eltham Sub Branch had closed), to see whether we thought that the albums might be of some interest to us. We thankfully took possession of them and have described their contents in one of the section on our website.

3) A 3 inch Mortar Sight and a Scottish Connection

Late in 2023 we were contacted by a person who had seen the 3 inch Mortar Sight on our 'VC' website and asked if we could take some careful measurements of it to assist in his attempts to construct a 3-D model of the Mortar – a hobby of his. After we sent the requested details we discovered that our contact was a member of the RAF, normally based in the north of Scotland but, at the time, on a Cyprus deployment as a weapons engineer for Eurofighter Typhoons! There has been an ongoing stream of emails between the MERSL and Cpl Baxter, with each expressing interest and support in the work of the other. In January we sent him a parcel of items from our merchandise collection as a small token of support for the work done by members of our allied military forces. Among other positive things, it's a story that shows the value of our online catalogue and how it can be of use to folk in completely unexpected places across the globe!

GROUP MEMBERS:

Peter Randle, Noel Campbell, Stu Kibell, Paul McColl, Gail Moncrieff, Leigh Ryan, Leonie Schulz, Bruce Taylor.



Membership Report

It is vital we not only sustain all members but recruit more. We currently have 2364 compared to 1822 in 2022 which is significant growth and shows the strength we currently sit as a organisation.

Not only the Committee but we feel all members at the RSL should be promoting what a wonderful facility we have and within that, an active charity and community service and how membership at the Montmorency Eltham RSL offers a fantastic opportunity to be a part of the best local establishment around.

Andrew Hall
Membership Officer



General Managers Report

What a Year!

Thanks to all Members and guests for a fantastic year, 2023 at the Montmorency Eltham RSL was one to remember,

This year has seen some very positive changes to our RSL, we have put in place a strong and hard working management team, James and Maddy who we all know are a great addition to the RSL, they both bring a their own unique qualities to the club, we were also very lucky to come across our head chef Ajay, he has taken our kitchen to a whole new level, we have seen our kitchen produce some fantastic meals and menu ideas.

I would also like to thank the committee for all your support and dedication to the RSL and its cause, it makes my job easier to have you all by my side.

Looking forward we are wanting to build on the foundation we laid in 2023, I feel we have developed the RSL into a destination venue to which members, guests, families and community groups can find themselves in a safe and enjoyable atmosphere to where they be excited by our entertainment and exquisite menu items.

I would also like to thank all members and volunteers that have helped me out during the year, without your help we wouldn't be anywhere near to where we are now.

I'm looking forward to 2024, we will jam pack the club with great entertainment and activities and some exciting developments to take place in the near future.

Thanks again for your support.

Michael McCombe
General Manager

