

Vandals hit turf club

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KERANG TURF Club's jockeys room was badly damaged by weekend vandalism, prompting an angry response from the club's acting president Colleen Shay.

A number of holes were smashed in a fibro cement-panelled wall.

The vandalism adds to what has been a difficult year for the club, including the loss of its Easter race meeting due to COVID-19 precautions, as it gets set to hold its Boxing Day meeting on December 28 without a crowd.

"Now we'll have to do something to replace the (wall) sheets by December 28 — more work for our hard-working volunteers," Ms Shay said.

"It's disgusting that someone has gone and punched holes in our building."

Ms Shay said committee members and other volunteers made up a small but hard-working group and were upset

by the extra burden.

The damage was discovered by volunteer Alan Shields when he arrived to water on Sunday and has been reported to Kerang police.

Leading Senior Constable Brakema said the incident occurred between 5pm on Friday and 7am on Sunday.

He explained the new damage was to the side wall nearest the stables.

Previous vandalism damaged the back and front of the building.

"Anyone who has any information in relation to (the incident) we'd definitely like to hear from them, either at the station or through Crime Stoppers (1800 333 000)."

Sen-Constable Brakema called for anyone on Park Road who may have video footage to contact police.

"It appears that they've come in through the gate in Park Road," he said.

As well as jockeys, the vandalised room serves race-day stewards and secretaries.

\$3m hospital boost

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MR Maw said there had been a risk that the theatre, which has not been significantly upgraded since it was built, could have become non-compliant with hospital standards.

The hospital's advocacy had included inviting former health minister Jenny Mikakos to tour the facility last year.

The grant, from the Regional Health Infrastructure Fund, was announced by Member for Northern Victoria Mark Gepp on Thursday.

Mr Maw said it would allow the creation of a recovery area and separate day procedure area — for things like iron and blood transfusions — as well as new "clean" and "dirty" areas and the installation of new lighting.

"At the moment our patients recover on the operating table," he said.

The grant will also enable the upgrade of anaesthetic and sterilisation equipment and the purchase of new equipment such as endoscopic cameras.

A separate grant of \$62,400 will allow the installation of an overhead fire sprinkler system for the acute section of the hospital, which will be connected to a 40,000-litre water tank.

Mr Maw said planning of the project had already begun.

"At the moment we're just working with our architects and staff on the redesign of the theatre complex," he said.

"We're hoping to commence work by the middle of next year."

He said he thought the upgraded facilities would help attract a new obstetrician to the hospital, given the planned retirement next year of Dr Peter Barker.

Mr Maw, however, will not get to see the results of the work.

He will leave his position in January, after two and a half years, to take over as general manager of disability service provider Home@Scope.

He said working at Cohuna had been a great experience but he had opted for the opportunity to be closer to his family.

news in brief

Truck starts Koroop fire

A TRUCK sparked an accidental grass and scrub fire on a Koroop farm on Sunday.

"It was about five hectares in size and brought under control in 20 minutes," Kerang Fire Brigade captain Ramon Steel said.

Five tankers were used to tackle the fire, two from Kerang and the others belonging to the Cohuna, Barham and Koondrook brigades.

Mr Steel said that although a truck started the blaze the vehicle was not damaged, having been driven out of harm's way.

"It was just an accidental cause and there was nothing suspicious," Mr Steel said.

Story time returns

STORY Time returns to Gannawarra Library Service's Cohuna and Kerang branches this week, with a Christmas theme, with the Cohuna event to now be held outdoors at Garden Park.

Suited to preschool children, the sessions will celebrate Christmas through songs and stories, with participants able to take home a special activity.

Since March, Story Time has been conducted online due to COVID-19 precautions, but library sessions are resuming just in time for Christmas.

Christmas Story Time sessions will be held at the Cohuna Garden Park on the Gateway Centre lawn tomorrow at 10.30am and at Kerang's Sir John Gorton Library on Thursday at 10.30am.

Each session will feature a guest reader, with Gannawarra Shire Council chief executive Tom O'Reilly filling that role in Cohuna and Mayor Charlie Gillingham doing so in Kerang.

Bookings are essential. Phone Cohuna Library on 5456 2124 or Sir John Gorton Library on 5452 1546.

Sydney flights back

FLIGHTS between Bendigo and Sydney have now resumed, with the first Qantas passenger flight from Sydney in months landing in the regional centre last week.

The Qantas Bendigo-Sydney service, one of 27 regional Qantas services to be suspended as the coronavirus hit, stopped running at the end of March.

The regional service, which was introduced in May last year, had been increased in August 2019 to include at least one return flight a day.

Solar powers up under a blue sky

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A SOLAR start-up company planning a huge new project at Tragowel has praised the role of Gannawarra Shire Council in supporting the solar industry in the region.

Melbourne-based real estate developer New Sky Group expects to finalise the purchase of land in coming days and prepare to start work on its first solar farm, for which it received a planning permit from the council in December 2018.

Project director Andrew Almenara, who was in Kerang last week, said the efforts of the council in campaigning for the recently announced KerangLink interconnector deserved recognition.

KerangLink or VNI West, which will upgrade transmission capacity between Victoria and New South Wales, is expected to "unlock" the congested grid and allow more renewable energy sources to be connected.

In a joint federal and state government announcement last month, \$200 million was pledged to get the infrastructure upgrade under way.

Eight solar projects with Gannawarra Shire planning permits that



New Sky Group project director Andrew Almenara on site at the Tragowel solar farm, where high voltage lines run overhead.

Picture: JENNY DENTON

had stalled due to the limitations of the grid are now expected to move ahead.

At least other 10 projects in the Murray River renewable energy zone — covering the Mildura, Swan Hill and Loddon council areas — also stand to benefit.

"People like (economic development manager) Roger Griffiths were out there flying the flag for council and I think Roger and (chief executive) Tom O'Reilly have done a really good leadership role with the back-

ing of the councillors, and they've taken the other councils along," Mr Almenara said.

"That region has the capacity to become something really, really special."

New Sky Group's staged 500-megawatt solar farm, if completed, will be one of Australia's largest to date, involving the installation of 4.5 million solar panels.

Three parcels of land between the Murray Valley Highway and Tragowel South Road will make up

its 2400-acre area.

However, the company is likely to start by developing only about a tenth of the projected capacity.

Mr Almenara said the KerangLink announcement was a game-changer that meant the group could move forward with its plans.

"These power lines are like a freeway. At the moment we probably need a five-lane freeway, and the current infrastructure's a two-lane," he said.

"It's only got about 80 megawatts left and our project's 520 megawatts."

"So we weren't prepared to make a substantial investment until we knew when (the upgrade) would happen."

Mr Almenara said New Sky had contracted consultants Jacobs to design the solar farm, which would be built in sections, with an initial development of about 50 megawatts.

The Australian Energy Market Operator told the *Gannawarra Times* it was working through a Regulatory Investment Test for Transmission (RIT-T) process in relation to new infrastructure and that the agreed date for delivery of the VNI West interconnector was 2027.

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