

Carnival lifts spirits

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COHUNA'S three-night new year carnival attracted good crowds and was "well received" despite some unwelcome rain, organisers said.

"I think everyone was happy," Sonia Wright, of Cohuna and District Progress Association, said. "But on New Year's Eve it bucketed down rain at around 8.30, so they did have to shut down for over an hour, which was disappointing."

"I thought it was ironic that a drought funding grant paid for the carnival and it rained every day it was on."

Attendance probably peaked at about 500 each day, Ms Wright said, with people taking advantage of free or cost-price rides on the Cha Cha, teacups ride, dodgem cars and giant slide.

There were also two sideshow games, showbags on sale and COVID-safe face-painting available.

"It was really well run by the carnival operators," Ms Wright said.

"They said it was a fantastic atmosphere and they would love to come back next year, though obviously that's a decision for (the association) going forward."

While local food businesses weren't open there were some

New Year's Eve food stalls, including a barbecue put on by the Cohuna Kangas.

"They just pulled that together in a day when they found out nothing was open that night," Ms Wright said.

"They were thrilled that they all sold out by 8.30pm."

The carnival was organised at the last minute by Ms Wright, who used funds from a federal grant allocated to the association by the council for a community event.

Ms Wright praised the role of council staff and local Lions Club members in making it happen.

"The council staff were fantastic, they really were," she said.

"Anything I required they guided me in the right direction, and they were really fast and efficient."

"The Cohuna Lions did the COVID marshalling and the clean-up – they've been absolutely outstanding and we depend on them really"

Ms Wright said the future of the traditional Cohuna New Year's Eve event was uncertain due to the difficulty of raising the necessary \$12,000 for fireworks and the need to find a new site to let them off.

"Our spot for the fireworks used to be over at Murray Sound but there's houses there now, it's been developed," she said.



A Cohuna carnival-goer waves from the teacups ride.

Picture: SHAYNE MOSTYN

Scoping pathology provider

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GANNAWARRA health services are set to receive improved pathology services under a new contract with a public provider, according to Kerang District Health (KDH).

KDH's contract with its current pathology provider, Australian Clinical Labs (ACL), expires at the end of February, and services will begin to transition to Austin Health Pathology from that date.

"We're looking for a much better service with the pathology because it's going to be a public service and the equipment available to our staff will be state of the art," KDH CEO Robert Jarman said.

Austin Heath Pathology director Nick Crinis said Austin Health would extend a successful service model it already operates in other parts of Victoria, including Castlemaine and Kyabram, to Kerang.

"Austin Health Pathology cur-

rently provides pathology services to a number of regional communities and we look forward to offering the same high-quality service to the patients of Kerang District Health," Mr Crinis said.

The new arrangement means while testing and diagnosis will continue in Kerang, laboratory work will be done in Swan Hill.

Mr Jarman said the shift to the Swan Hill lab would mean faster turnaround times on tests due to Swan Hill's longer operating hours as well as access to a greater range of testing, including rapid Covid-19 and flu tests.

KDH board chair and former laboratory manager Kylie Liebmann said the board endorsed the switch, which would ensure "sustainable and stable" long-term pathology services and "new equipment and technologies to meet the needs of the community".

The change comes following conflict last year between Australian Clinical Labs and local

health services after ACL in April closed the Kerang lab on COVID-19 grounds and didn't want to reopen it.

At the time, Cohuna District Hospital CEO Ben Maw said he believed the closure was in part due to cost issues.

According to media reports, ACL had closed or partially closed pathology labs at 12 regional Victorian hospitals over four years and was accused by health advocates of making commercial, cost-cutting decisions which jeopardised patient care.

The company eventually reopened the Kerang lab with reduced operating hours but meanwhile the State Government decided to initiate a changeover of hospital pathology labs across the state to the public service with metropolitan hospitals set to take on the task of running them.

Mr Jarman said ACL had served the community well for many years.

"However the opportunities to improve our pathology service and be part of a broader regional healthcare network will deliver greater efficiencies for our Mallee community," he said.

"The transition will enable Kerang to benefit from strategic state-wide public pathology service planning which will enhance system responsiveness, sustainability and optimise patient outcomes."

Mr Jarman said the transition will take some time, during which it would be "business as usual across the health service".

He said Austin Health Pathology would be talking to current ACL staff about ongoing employment opportunities at Kerang and Swan Hill.

"At the end of the day what it means for staff is that they'll be offered employment with Austin Health Pathology which operates within the Victorian public sector, which I think existing staff will see as very positive."

Stepping up

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Mr Jarman said while visiting hours to both acute hospital patients and nursing home residents have again had to be reduced, there have been no reductions to the hospital's elective surgery list or community services, as occurred during the previous wave of the virus.


"Previously we had to reduce our day activities and the operation of the men's shed, but at this stage all those services are intact and still running," he said.

"The main change is our visiting hours to patients and residents."

All health services and residential facilities are subject to health department directives on visiting hours, and with these subject to rapid change, anyone intending to visit patients or aged care home residents is advised to phone ahead to the relevant facility.

The rapid response COVID-19 clinic, located in the NDCH driveway at 33 King Edward St, Cohuna, is operating from Monday to Friday this week from 10am to noon and 1pm to 3pm.

No appointment is necessary to get tested.



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