



# WIB

WOMEN IN BUSINESS

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GANNAWARRA  
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**Group General Manager**  
Renee Bennett

**Managing Editor**  
Michelle Brady

**Editorial**  
Peter Bannan, Sam James, Edmund Coleman, Patrick Tucker

**Advertising Manager**  
Jenna Mobilio - jenna.mobilio@theguardian.com.au

**Advertising**  
Emma Edelsten, Nicole Fraser

**Production Manager**  
Michael Auricht - mic.auricht@theguardian.com.au

**Production**  
Chris Barnes



**ACROSS the Swan Hill and Gannawarra regions, women are shaping the future of business with creativity, resilience, and community spirit.**

From bustling shopfronts to innovative home-based ventures and regional enterprises, their stories reflect not only hard work and determination but also the unique character of life along the Murray.

This special feature shines a light on the women who are building, leading, and inspiring — the entrepreneurs who have turned challenges into opportunities, and whose passion keeps local business thriving.

Whether they’re revitalising long-standing family firms, launching bold start-ups, or mentoring the next generation, these women remind us that success is as much about connection and heart as it is about ambition.

Join us as we meet the women behind the businesses — their journeys, their insights, and their vision for a vibrant, inclusive future for our community.



# A unique experience



Elli Carpenteri and Aleisha Hogan have launched a luxury hair and scalp spa service.

**ALEISHA Hogan has joined Paper, Scissors, Rock owner Elli Carpenteri to launch EA Collective, a luxury scalp and hair spa.**

Aleisha has worked at Paper, Scissors, Rock for almost a decade, and since starting out as an apprentice and completing her Certificate III in hairdressing at the salon, she has worked up to salon manager.

She has now taken the lead on promotion and social media with EA Collective.

"I never would have trusted anyone else to go into business with, so it was a no-brainer to get Aleisha on board," Elli said.

"I couldn't let the idea of the spa go, but I couldn't have run both the salon and launched the spa without her help."

The duo started planning the spa a year ago, after the hair spa set up at the salon became popular to the point that staff ran out of room and time.

While the spa feels like a luxury service, it also provides a diagnostic, results-based service.

"With our K-Scan technology, we can diagnose most scalp conditions, such as scalp irritation, dandruff, hair loss and breakage," Aleisha said.

"It's a results-based service, so clients get a relaxing scalp, face and chest massage in a calming atmosphere, and leave with solutions for their scalp concerns.

"Problems like dandruff are so personal and can be really upsetting, so we're excited to offer something in town that can solve those concerns.

"Clients can expect to be impressed,

relaxed, and to get solutions."

The treatments are available for men and women and the products used are tailored to hair and scalp type and concern.

Bookings are also available in doubles, triples or larger groups, perfect for a hens party, couple's staycation or bestie weekend.

Acclimating to business ownership was a challenge, but having Elli by her side and support from her family has made the transition more manageable for Aleisha.

"I always said I would never open a business by myself because it takes a lot of time and effort, so it has been really valuable to have Elli beside me to share her experience, to answer questions, help with the things that come up, or sometimes you just need someone to say yes,

**Elli Carpenteri  
Aleisha Hogan**

even if you know the answer," she said. "I can't be at EA Collective all the time because I have clients at Paper, Scissors, Rock, so I'm learning how to delegate and not take on every task.

"Getting the space ready for the open was a huge challenge, we did drastic renovations with the help of a lot of friends and family.

"Both sets of our parents were there doing the finishing touches on the last days, and our partners painted the whole place."

Clients are treated to an immersive, relaxing experience.



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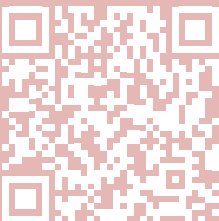
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# Blueprint for ambition and resilience

Chloe Kelly



Chloe Kelly's boutique label blends high-quality wine with a deeply personal touch.

**CHLOE** Kelly pours a glass of her latest Shiraz, the ruby-red liquid catching the afternoon sun over the Murray River.

"I wanted a business that worked for me, not the other way around," she said. And that's exactly what she's done with Joy John Wines, her boutique label that blends high-quality wine with a deeply personal touch. Growing up in Hillston, NSW, Chloe's childhood revolved around agriculture. "Dinner table discussions were often about crops, livestock, or the weather," she said. "It gave me a solid understanding of hard work and adaptation." That foundation proved invaluable when juggling the demands of motherhood, study, and a career in the male-dominated wine industry. Chloe founded Joy John Wines in 2018 after facing a career crossroads. With two daughters under three and years of experience as a cellar hand, she

encountered bosses who doubted her ability to 'do it all'. Instead of stepping back, she stepped up. "I wanted to show my daughters that you don't have to choose between family and following your passion," she said. "If mum can, I can — but now it's more about me being proud of myself too." From her casual cellar door on a small block in Nyah, Chloe oversees every aspect of the business, from sourcing grapes and creating blends, to lab checks, bottling, and deliveries, often with help from her husband, Ryan, and their children. This year, Joy John Wines will release six varieties: Prosecco, Pinot Grigio, Chardonnay, Rosé, Shiraz, and Sangiovese. Success hasn't come without hurdles. Early bushfires in King Valley damaged her fruit, forcing Chloe to source replacement grapes at a higher cost. Yet those challenges shaped her approach: diversifying suppliers and regions to protect both quality and quantity.

"You learn to take risks and adapt, because that's what running a business really is," Chloe said. Highlights abound. Sending her first export order to the United Kingdom, traveling to Italy and France with her family to study winemaking, and hosting the annual Joy John Wines Charity Ball, which raises funds for causes like providing a cuddle cot for grieving families, are milestones she treasures. Chloe's advice to aspiring women entrepreneurs is simple but powerful. "Do what you're interested in, find the way you learn best, and don't let imposter syndrome hold you back," she said. "Surround yourself with the right people and move past the rest." From humble beginnings in Hillston to riverside tastings in Nyah, Chloe has crafted more than wine — she's crafted a blueprint.



Boutique family run wine producer, located in Nyah on the Murray Valley Highway

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# Driving change

**AFTER 19 years in the male-dominated auto industry, Rebecca Parseghian recently embarked on a new challenge as dealer principal (DP) of brand-new dealership Swan Hill Mazda.**

Along with her husband and business partner, Sebastian Parseghian, Rebecca owns Swan Hill Toyota and Kia and said she was proud to bring the quality Mazda product to Swan Hill for the first time. The addition is a great complement to their experience and skills, and especially Rebecca herself, as one of only two female DPs in Victoria. However, Rebecca said it was not always smooth sailing. "The industry was very different back then," she reflects. "Even as late as 2015, the women were sent off to have their nails done, go shopping or wine tasting, while the 'big boys' had their meeting."



Rebecca Parseghian is one of only two female dealer principals in the state.

I could make an impact was in showing up, working hard, and proving myself, as an equal. "So, I boycotted the female events. "I decided, no, I'm here for business. "It wasn't that anybody was being mean or exclusionary ... it was just an assumption. "A couple of other women came up to me and said, 'Oh, are you allowed to do that?'"

"Then a few more said they wanted to attend the business meetings too." Ten years later there are more women, and they are becoming more accepted, Rebecca said. The DP represents a powerful shift in an industry that is rapidly changing. Early in her professional career, Rebecca worked as a telemarketer before rising up the ranks to call centre and customer service manager. "Customer service skills are transferable," she says. "It's about understanding people, solving problems, and building relationships." With 10 Toyota President's Awards and many other awards under the dealership's belt, Rebecca isn't just breaking barriers — she is rebuilding them entirely. "It's not about proving something to anyone, it's about doing great work, looking after our customers, and lead-

Rebecca Parseghian

ing change," she says. Working alongside Sebastian, they have created a partnership that defies traditional business models. "We each bring different and complementary skills, it works," she says. Bringing Mazda to Swan Hill wasn't just a business expansion, it was a statement. "We're demonstrating that leadership isn't about gender; it's about expertise, passion, and commitment," she says. Above all, Sebastian and Rebecca are profoundly grateful for the hard work of their wonderful team, and the acceptance of the local community. Come and see Rebecca and the team, where the relationship is more important than the sale.



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# The queen of comfort

Jan  
Harry

**KERANG born and bred, Jan Harry is a familiar face in the local community — known for her warm spirit, dedication to family and community, and helping locals create the home they've always wanted.**

As the proud owner of Visual Appeal Furniture and Bedding, Jan has spent the past 12 and a half years building a business that is the epitome of what makes a country town tick.

"I'm a local through and through," she said.

"I'm a wife, a mother of three, and a proud Nanny to four beautiful grandchildren, as well as an avid golfer these days."

Initially joining the business with friends, Jan soon became its driving force.

"Friends at the time asked me to join them in purchasing the business, and I went in as the operator," she said.

"My partners were silent investors from the beginning, so the plan was always for me to potentially take over the business fully in time. Four years later, I was able to make that a reality and purchase it outright. I've really enjoyed my time here at VA — there have been challenges along the way, but each one has been an opportunity to learn and grow."

Today, Visual Appeal Furniture and Bedding stands as the largest stockist of all the big-name furniture brands in

the Mallee district.

The store stocks Australian made, international brands, locally and custom-made furniture, catering to all interiors, styles, and budgets.

Visual Appeal is also a proud member of the Beds R Us group — the largest independent bedding group in Australasia — supplying Australian made Sleepyhead and SleepMaker mattresses, designed for all bodies and budgets.

Before taking on the furniture and bedding world, the businesswoman already had experience in local enterprise.

Jan was part-owner of the much-loved cafe Chino's on Victoria and later managed the front of house at Kerang's local pharmacy.

"I was certainly new to the furniture and bedding business," she said.

"I soon found my way and haven't looked back."

Owning a business has brought lessons, triumphs, and the occasional surprise.

"Managing staff in a small business can be challenging," she said.

"I've been incredibly fortunate to work with such dedicated and talented people. I'm especially grateful for my full-time staff member, Jon, who has been with me since day one. His loyalty, reliability, and support have been invaluable — I truly couldn't have done it without him."

"But purchasing a large business in

Kerang in the first place — that was a huge accomplishment. It felt daunting at the time, but I'm so glad I did it."

Jan attributes much of her success to surrounding herself with good people.

"My accountant is very important to me and helps keep me on track financially," she said.

"Despite not being involved with the day-to-day running of the business, my husband Scott has always been my greatest support and has always backed me and my decisions, for which I'm very grateful."

"It's important to stay in touch with key people around you to ensure the business thrives."

Her philosophy on risk is bold and practical.

"I've challenged myself with making changes within the business over the years. I backed myself, and it paid off. If something doesn't work, just make another change and move on."

For women considering their own business journey, Jan's advice is heartfelt.

"Back yourself and give it a go. It's such a rewarding achievement being a business owner."

With more than a decade of success behind her and a passion that still drives her forward, Jan continues to prove that confidence, community, and courage are the real cornerstones of business success.

Jan Harry is the queen of comfort in Kerang.

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## YOUR LOCAL PREMIUM FURNITURE STORE





Jessica Scott is a co-owner of Syd Wilson Auto Electrics.

# Wired for success

**JESSICA Scott said running a business was like having a child that never grows up.**

Following a decades-long career in teaching, Jessica runs Syd Wilson Auto Electrics, alongside her husband and “partner in crime.”

“My husband had the business before we met,” Jessica said.

“But over the years I’ve been involved in different ways — helping out on Fridays, weekends, and during school holidays while I was still teaching.

“Now that I’ve finished my teaching career, I’ve been able to step more fully into the business.”

After 24 years as a music teacher, Jessica admits that an auto electrical business might seem like an unexpected

career change.

Yet she’s found a surprising harmony between her former life in education and her new role in the workshop.

“I’ve been involved in music since my early primary school days, so owning an auto electrician business might seem an unlikely fit,” she said with a laugh.

“But I enjoy the challenge and have learned a great deal over the years. My computer skills have really helped me contribute and support the business in meaningful ways.”

With the growth of Syd Wilson Auto Electrics, Jessica has crafted a pivotal role that harnesses her strengths in organisation, innovation, and relationship-building.

“I’ve found a role that feels right for

**Jessica Scott**

me — one that lets me contribute without stepping on anyone else’s toes and allows me to find my own rhythm.”

That rhythm includes adapting to the unexpected, but Jessica is quick to credit her team for making it all work.

“I’m really fortunate to have such a great team around me, and their support makes a big difference in how the business runs.”

For women thinking about starting their own business, Jessica’s advice is clear-eyed and practical.

“There’s a constant need to adapt, re-create, and expand within the four walls of the shop, all while keeping the foundations steady.”

**“I’m really fortunate to have such a great team around me, and their support makes a big difference in how the business runs.”**

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# Giving it a good go

**SARAH Keighran is responsible for ensuring every journey starts with confidence.**

Keeping the region on track is no small feat—but for Sarah, it’s all in a day’s work.

At the helm of Goodyear Auto Care, and working alongside her husband Liam, they’re not just changing tyres—they’re helping locals go the distance, one safe journey at a time.

The warm support from Sarah Keighran’s family, the local community, and fellow Swan Hill businesses made the transition into running Goodyear Auto Care a smooth and welcoming experience for the duo, and they haven’t looked back.

The couple was living away from their shared hometown with their two young children when the opportunity to buy the business off Liam’s parents came up six years ago.



“We wanted to come back home to Swan Hill and bring the children up with their grandparents around and within the local community,” Sarah said.

“We have leaned on each other and the support of our two younger children, who have been amazing,” Sarah said.

“I was working in account management and sales for a company in Mackay for 10 years.”

Fueled by self-motivation, she quickly climbed the retail ranks to a stage where she was independently running her own client base.

Taking over an established tyre business was uncharted territory for the duo, and while it was unde-

nably daunting, they were ready to rise to the challenge.

“It was a lot less intimidating with my father-in-law Sarge showing me the ropes of all the accounts and book keeping for both premises,” Sarah said.

“He was brilliant in supporting me to transfer my knowledge into a totally different trade in a male-dominated industry.”

They took over the business just as Victoria was plunged into its first Covid-19 lockdown.

It proved to be a challenging time to be stepping into new ownership, with uncertainty at every turn.

“Small business isn’t easy, it’s a lot of hard work behind the scenes out of regular hours, you need to be hands-on and invested for it to work,” she said.

“With Covid, it could have gone either way, we had to work harder

**Sarah Keighran**

while homeschooling kids, everything was uncertain, so we are really proud that we’re still going.”

Thanks to their hard work, unwavering determination, and deep commitment to the Swan Hill community, Sarah and Liam have not only weathered the storm, but they’ve emerged stronger than ever, with no signs of slowing down.

“The support from the community has been overwhelming, they’ve rallied behind us from the start,” Sarah said.

“If you’re thinking of owning a business, make sure you surround yourself with good people and good support systems, trust yourself and give it a good go.”



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Juanita turned a bold career pivot into a booming business.

# Breaking the mould

Juanita Iannucci

**A FAR cry from the boardrooms of Melbourne, these days Juanita Iannucci is more likely to be found in PPE than Prada.**

After years in executive roles in Melbourne, Juanita founded Final Sweep Solutions and is breaking the mould of what it means to be a cleaner and businesswoman.

The Swan Hill business specialises in crisis and trauma cleaning, biohazard remediation, squalor and hoarding remediation, and residential and housekeeping services.

"I know that the work I'm doing now is incredibly important," Juanita smiles. "Having a clean, safe and hygienic house is something people can take for granted - but it's also a point of fundamental dignity that everyone deserves."

"I'm serving people in ways that genuinely help them, and that's where I'm meant to be."

What began as a bold career pivot has quickly turned into a booming business.

In just a matter of months Final Sweep Solutions has expanded to a team of four like-minded women.

"Our residential division is at its limit, and that's something I'm really proud of," Juanita says.

"The demand has been incredible. We've done a lot of meaningful work — decluttering, squalor, trauma cleaning

— and every job makes a difference." Communication, Juanita said, is one of her proudest professional skills and a non-negotiable in a field where discretion and sensitivity are paramount.

"It's so important to communicate clearly and with empathy," she says.

"Whether I'm speaking with clients, families, or community services, being able to adapt my communication style and really connect is vital."

"When you're going into someone's home, you don't take that for granted - someone is letting you into their personal space, and that's sacred."

A self-described introvert-turned-extrovert, she's learned to use both sides of her personality as strengths.

"I was quite reserved as a child," she says.

"But over time, I've really leaned into what I love — connecting with people. I can read a room really well, so I know when to be outgoing and when to just listen.

"That balance helps me build trust, which is everything in my line of work."

That same drive to connect and exceed expectations has always defined her.

"You can give me a task, and I'll somehow make it more than it needs to be," Juanita laughs.

"I've just always been wired that way — to go the extra mile."

Understanding that wiring came

with her ADHD diagnosis in her early 30s, something she describes as both enlightening and empowering.

"It made a lot of sense," she says. "I'd always been a high achiever, but never quite understood why my brain worked the way it did."

"The diagnosis helped me be kinder to myself, and it's also helped me work better with clients who are neurodivergent."

"I work with many clients who face challenges with decluttering or hoarding, often feeling stuck or overwhelmed. While I don't share my own experiences, I deeply empathise with their feelings and strive to support them without judgment or labels. My goal is always to create a safe, understanding environment where everyone feels respected"

Juanita also holds a raft of highly-specialised qualifications from the IICRC, ensuring her team operates with the highest safety and professional standards.

The business owner also invests continuously in further training and education.

"I'm a lifelong learner," she says. "Every qualification I add gives me new tools to serve clients better. It's about always improving, always learning." "Some days I miss the heels, but I know I'm giving so much more now. This is where I'm meant to be."

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# A store full of soul

WHEN Maddi Fuzzard and her husband bought their Koondrook farm in 2022, they knew they were putting down roots in a place they wanted to call home.

But it wasn't long before another opportunity came knocking, one that would allow Maddi to combine her lifelong passion for food with an extensive background in hospitality.

When the business owner saw the general store for sale last year, she jumped at the opportunity.

"It was an itch I had to scratch," she said.

"I've always had a passion for everything food and cooking. I love making up recipes and things in my head. Cooking has always been a big part of who I am."

That love for food began early, growing up in the kitchen alongside her nan, the woman who raised her and taught her the heart of home

cooking.

Now, Maddi brings that same warmth and creativity to the Koondrook General Store every day, from hearty country meals to fresh-baked treats and a range of produce direct from the farm.

Running the store is no small task.

Maddi works six days a week, taking on everything from cooking and baking to serving customers and managing the front of house.

"The pressure from reps, customers, and keeping on top of orders and stock — it can be a lot," she admitted.

"Especially when you're trying to balance it all with kids."

As a mum of three — two boys aged eight and five, and a three-year-old daughter — Maddi's days are full from sunrise to sunset.

She's grateful for the support of her partner and friends, who step in



Maddi Fuzzard

when things get hectic.

Sharing her advice to other women thinking about starting a business, she urged them to consider the timing.

"Wait until your kids are older," she laughed.

"I wish I'd known how little time I'd have for myself — but you just learn to juggle and make it work. Your priorities change."

"It's hard work, but it's rewarding. I love seeing people enjoy what I've made — that makes it all worth it."

Maddi Fuzzard brings a life of passion for cooking to the Koondrook General Store.

## THE KOONDROOK General Store

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# A novel approach

WHEN Sarah Klomp took ownership of Collins Booksellers early last year she wasn't just buying a business, she was fulfilling a lifelong dream.

"I had always told my husband Michael one day I want to own my own bookstore," she said.

"The owner of Collins Swan Hill reached out to me when she was wanting to sell the store, as I had a friend who worked for her and knew I may be interested, and I immediately said yes."

One of the biggest surprises since taking over the store has been the sheer enthusiasm of the region's readers.

"I wasn't expecting just how many

people in Swan Hill not only read, but love books as much as I do," Sarah said.

That enthusiasm has helped fuel Collins Booksellers Swan Hill's impressive growth—earning the store the title of largest growth of all Collins stores across Australia in the last financial year.

"It's been incredibly rewarding," Sarah said.

"Hosting multiple author events in collaboration with our incredible local library has also been a highlight."

Like the premise of a feel-good novel, Sarah runs the business with her best friend Gab.

"As our store manager, Gab has been instrumental in the success of the business and has supported me both personally and professionally over the last 15 months," Sarah said.

"We increased our stock levels exponentially since taking over the business, as well as greatly expanding the range of products we stock."

"It has definitely paid off, seeing growth in the business and being able to offer a larger range of products in store such as puzzles, board games, and lots of educational games and tools."

From a lifelong dream to a thriving success story, Sarah said the people around her made all the difference.

"I am very lucky to have an extremely supportive husband and family who have been there with me every step of the way," she said.

"My dad, who is also a local business owner, has given me great advice, and Gab has been instrumental in the success of the business."

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# Adversity into ambition

AT just 30, Chevorn Barclay has transformed personal adversity into a purpose-led enterprise, redefining how support services engage with people living with disabilities.

As the founder and managing director of Ability & Ambition, Chevorn has created a movement grounded in empathy, authenticity and inclusion.

She launched the Swan Hill-based organisation in April 2020, during Victoria's Covid lockdowns.

At the time, Chevorn was grieving the recent loss of her father, experiencing housing instability, and had just left full-time employment to pursue a vision with no financial backing or safety net.

"Honestly, starting Ability & Ambition was the biggest risk I've ever taken," she said.

"I was working 14-hour days, seven days a week, juggling everything from client work to administration."

"Part of it was trying to outrun my grief, but it was also about proving that I could build something that mattered."

Since then, the business has grown into a respected service provider employing 13 staff.

Its services are delivered through Ohana House, a purpose-built facility that reflected Chevorn's mission and created an inclusive, safe and empowering space for



Ability and Ambition founder and managing director Chevron Barclay has redefined how support services engage with people living with disabilities.

people living with disabilities.

Chevorn's drive was personal.

She grew up in a home shaped by domestic violence, substance

abuse and instability, and was profoundly impacted by the experiences of her father and brother, who were both diagnosed with

ASD/ADHD.

"I saw first-hand how stigma and systemic barriers affected the people I loved most," Chevorn said.

"That experience pushed me to create a space where people could be their authentic selves, free from judgment and fully accepted."

In early 2025, Chevorn was diagnosed with ADHD herself, a moment that brought deeper insight into her work.

"It gave me a deeper understanding of why this safe space matters," she said.

"It's not just about supporting others, but also about honouring and nurturing myself."

Chevorn left school in Year 10 and began her career as a painting and decorating apprentice.

She went on to work in nursing, disability support, youth care, family services and the NDIS.

"I've worn every hat," she said.

"From support worker and administrator to HR and compliance."

"Having lived every layer of the business, I understand the challenges my team faces."

"That insight helps me lead with both practicality and values."

Today, Chevorn focuses on innovation, leadership and culture, ensuring Ability & Ambition remains a place where both staff and clients thrive.

Her work extends beyond service delivery.

Through events like the Dating

Chevorn  
Barclay

“Don't let anyone tell you what you can't achieve. The way you grew up does not define your future.”

with Disability Gala and support for Brighter Day, a youth suicide prevention initiative, she uses her platform to raise awareness and foster inclusion.

"These events are more than fundraisers," Chevorn said.

"They're platforms to foster connection, raise awareness and create genuine inclusion."

Chevorn is especially passionate about empowering women, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to believe in their potential.

"Don't let anyone tell you what you can't achieve," she said.

"The way you grew up does not define your future."

For Chevorn, Ability & Ambition is more than a business: it is a testament to the power of purpose, lived experience and resilience.



## Ability and Ambition

### "Listen, Collaborate, Achieve"

*Ability & Ambition sets out to inspire not just our participants, but all members of our community to believe that no matter what barriers they face, there are endless opportunities available to them*

*We are here to empower others and support them to realise & accomplish their own individual ambitions whatever they may be*



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378 Campbell Street, Swan Hill



# Driven by ethics

**Nikita Powney**

**WHEN** Kerang resident Nikita Powney launched Platinum Home Sales in November 2021, she entered a market already filled with experienced agents, but that challenge only fuelled her determination.

"I try not to put myself in risky positions if I can help it," she said.

"But starting a business in a town with a heavy real estate presence, that was definitely a risk.

"And I'm truly loving the journey."

Since opening her independently owned and operated agency, Nikita has built her business on one non-negotiable principle: ethics.

"My main consideration within my business is to be ethical," she said.

"The rest seems to align and fall into place."

With a career spanning more than 17 years in customer service, including roles at JI Office Supplies and Landmark McNeil Saunders/Nutrien, Nikita's experi-

ence laid a strong foundation for her real estate venture.

She said her journey into the industry began unexpectedly, after accepting an admin role that led into property management.

"My passion and drive for real estate grew from there," Nikita said.

As a solo agent, she's proud to have reached key milestones, including selling her very first home independently.

Platinum Home Sales now serves Kerang and surrounds, offering residential, rural, commercial sales including rental management.

Nikita said she embraced each lesson on her journey as part of her growth.

"You can't please everyone, but you should aim to," she said.

"Be kind, be considerate, and make people feel good about themselves.

"That's what I've learned."

Nikita said the reality of running a business, especially as a woman doing it alone, is far from nine-to-five.

"I wish I knew how many hours it would take," she said.

"It's been difficult to adjust, but my clients and supporters give me the drive."

Nikita's agency regularly lists properties across town and in surrounding rural areas, reflecting her deep knowledge of the local landscape.

In the past 12 months alone, Platinum Home Sales has sold 15 properties with a median sold price of around \$315,000.

Nikita encourages other women thinking about starting a business.

"Don't hesitate. Put your best foot forward, and you will be rewarded," she said.

Backed by strong values, a love for her hometown, and tireless commitment, Nikita continues to deliver.

"Selling solutions, not promises," she said, forging a reputation as a trusted and grounded local real estate expert.

Platinum Home Sales founder and director Nikita Powney has forged a reputation as a trusted and grounded local real estate expert.



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# Learning the ropes on the fly

**Emily Davies**



Emily Davies urged women to back themselves and surround themselves with the right people.

**IF** someone told Emily Davies in 2005 that her future would involve cattle, feedlots, and dairy farms stretching across Victoria, she probably would have laughed between transactions at the Commonwealth Bank.

"Honestly, I had zero experience in livestock," Emily admitted with a grin.

"I was learning as we went, and every day felt like a new adventure — or a new spreadsheet."

Born in 1987 and raised in Melbourne's western suburbs, Emily spent 16 years in retail banking, carefully balancing numbers and clients' anxieties.

Life, however, had other plans.

Married to Stewart in 2016, the couple juggles a blended family of five kids, while slowly transforming a hobby into a full-blown agricultural empire.

Their first taste of the industry came in 2015 with a modest farm purchase, followed by another in 2018 —and then,

in 2020, the stakes got bigger.

By February 2022, the Davies family was in Cohuna, starting a dairy, before snapping up MVP Feeds in 2023, integrating it into their expanding business model.

This year, they added a beef feedlot to the mix.

Emily oversees finance, HR, and compliance, a role perfectly suited to her banking background.

"Numbers have always made sense to me," she said, "but livestock ... that's been a crash course in patience, resilience, and figuring things out on the fly."

The journey hasn't been without its quirks.

Between feeding cattle, juggling cash flow, and coordinating school runs, Emily and Stewart have had to invent their own rules for time management.

"Everything is a risk when it's your own," Emily reflected.

"It all falls on you, but you just keep pushing.

"And when it pays off, like buying MVP Feeds or launching our feedlot, it feels incredible."

Emily offered advice to women dreaming of similar ventures: back yourself and surround yourself with the right people.

"They don't have to be in agriculture," she said, "just like-minded and willing to share ideas. It makes the hard work worth it."

From suburban bank branches to sprawling Victorian pastures, Emily Davies' story is proof that sometimes the numbers on a spreadsheet aren't the only things that count — sometimes it's the courage to leap, the family beside you, and a few thousand head of cattle to teach you the ropes.



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# No clipping Sam's wings

**SUPPORTING the wellbeing and growth of her community is at the heart of Better Bookkeeping Management owner and manager Sam Cottingham's purpose, both in and out of work hours.**

The solo part-time venture she started in 2019 has grown into two established companies, BBKM Bookkeeping and BBKM Plan Management, operating out of offices around the region and supporting clients around the country.

Through BBKM Plan Management, Sam leads a team that provides boutique, personalised NDIS plan management services, from submitting claims and paying invoices to ensuring participants' funding is used in a way that supports clients' goals.

"At first, I treated BBKM as a side venture, but I quickly realised there was a big gap for quality, trustworthy bookkeeping in regional Victoria," Sam said.

"As I worked with more clients, I also saw how NDIS participants were struggling with the financial administration side of their plans. "Expanding into plan management was a natural progression, and the need was enormous.

"I didn't expect such a high demand for NDIS plan management in rural and regional communities, and it was eye-opening to see

how many people needed that level of support."

Sam has been working in accounting since she graduated with a Bachelor of Accounting from La Trobe University in 2007, first as a tax accountant before moving into business management accounting at small-to-medium businesses and an ASX-listed company.

Those experiences gave Sam the skills and confidence to start her own business.

"It gave me both the technical skills and the strategic thinking I needed to run a business, and working in an ASX-listed company taught me about governance and compliance, while working with SMEs taught me the importance of relationships and adaptability," she said.

"My Certified Practising Accountant qualification gave me the credibility and depth of knowledge to build a practice clients can trust.

"I've learned that relationships matter just as much as numbers — the trust we build with clients and participants is at the heart of everything we do."

Alongside managing her fast-growing businesses, Sam has dedicated her time and energy to supporting rural communities in other ways.

"I put a lot of weight on giving



Sam Cottingham's business has rapidly grown since 2019.

**Sam Cottingham**

back to the community that supports my businesses," she said.

"I'm a trustee for multiple scholarships at Swan Hill College and employ dedicated staff to search out and action ways BBKM can give back locally.

"This isn't just about large-scale financial contributions, like the RUSH Show & Shine in support of mental health, but also about assisting everyday organisations and clubs who need funding — whether that's through grants like the Bendigo Flying Club defibrillator or smaller, grass-roots community initiatives.

"I'm also incredibly proud of the work I've done as part of the Hopeful Hildas flying team, competing in the Outback Air Race to raise funds for the Royal Flying Doctor Service, which has been an incredible way to combine my love of adventure with giving back to the community.

"We raised \$17,260 for the Royal Flying Doctor Service in 2022 and \$35,000 for Angel Flight in 2023.

"We took to the skies again on August 18 this year and raised \$26,005 for the Royal Flying Doctors."

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# Inspiring movement

**Nikki Capone**

**FOR the past eight years, Nikki Capone of Dance It Up Swan Hill has offered a community space where passion, movement, and self-expression take centre stage.**

Her journey began early, sparked by a love of music and performance that ignited her enduring passion for dance.

After completing her schooling, she moved to Melbourne to pursue formal dance studies, but eventually returned home.

The studio began with something close to home, her young daughter's

love of dance.

Determined to give her a safe and encouraging place to follow that passion, Nikki built a studio that now inspires and nurtures many others in the same way.

From modest beginnings, the studio has grown into one of Swan Hill's leading hubs for the performing arts, now offering classes in acrobatics, ballet, jazz, hip hop, contemporary and its popular Kinder Dance program.

This year, it reached a milestone of more than 220 students enrolled.

Nikki credited the studio's success to the unwavering support of the community.

"We wouldn't be here without the incredible families who trust us with their children's growth, learning, and

love of dance," she said.

Inclusivity remains central to the studio's values, with a strong commitment to being an all-abilities dance school.

"It's incredibly important to us that every student feels welcome, supported, and able to shine," she said.

Alongside her stands a devoted team of women who share her passion and vision, each playing a vital role in the studio's ongoing success and meaning so much to her personally.

Behind Nikki's success is the unwavering support of her family.

She said her husband has been her biggest encourager and constant source of strength, grounding her through every challenge and triumph.

Nikki also credited her parents,

who supported her passion for dance from a young age and still lend a helping hand at the studio today.

"I'd be lost without my family," she said.

Nikki said balancing business and family life has been challenging, but the rewards have been worth it, especially seeing her daughter thrive within the studio.

"Seeing her grow up in this environment makes every sacrifice worthwhile," she said.

While the dance world can be competitive, Nikki said community was key.

"I'm proud of the culture we've created," she said.

"One that uplifts, supports, and celebrates every dancer who walks through our doors."

Nikki Capone provides a community space where passion, movement, and self-expression take centre stage.  
**Picture: Supplied**

QUITE SIMPLY... *Classical*

STAY IN STYLE, STAY... *Contemporary*

ALL THAT... *Jazz*

HOP RIGHT TO IT IN... *Hip-Hop*

FLIPS OUT FOR... *Acrobatics*

STRAIGHT TO THE... *Pointe/Pointe Training*

AGE IS NO LIMIT IN... *Adult Fitness*

TEACHING THEM HOW TO... *Kinder Dance*



**0439 322 283**

admin@danceitupswanhill.com



Carrie-Ann Robins has brought style to Swan Hill at Innocence & Attitude.

**FOR eight years, Innocence & Attitude founder and operator Carrie-Ann Robins has poured her heart and soul into building a boutique that not only services the community but upholds her values.**

Carrie-Ann is a firm believer in leading by example and works closely with her team, taking on every task that needs doing to ensure the store feels welcoming, inspiring and fun.

"Innocence & Attitude is everything

# A family attitude

to me, it's a dream brought to life," she said.

"For me, it's not just about selling clothes, it's about helping people of all ages feel confident in their style. Bringing fresh, on-trend, quality and affordable fashion to Swan Hill for every milestone and occasion, supporting Australian brands and creating a boutique that locals are proud of.

"I feel proud every time I see someone wearing something from my store."

Working for many family owned and operated businesses since the age of 13, and growing up as the eldest of three children with two working parents, helped shaped Carrie-Ann's appreciation for hard work, responsibility, authenticity and genuine customer connection.

This ignited her passion to build a business of her own.

Since Carrie-Ann opened the business in 2017, her husband Craig - who

she also partners with the running of Craig Robins Pest Control - and their two children, have played an important and integral role in her journey and success.

The store's name was inspired by her kids.

"I cherish my children's involvement in both businesses, and they live it day to day," she said.

"My daughter is now employed as the warehouse and inventory manager at Innocence & Attitude, which is a proud Mum moment.

"Building Innocence & Attitude from nothing has been a huge achievement, while at the same time, I've managed to stay a very present mum for my children, which I am incredibly proud of.

"I hope I have inspired them to start their own businesses in the future."

Growing up in a small rural town, Carrie-Ann developed a deep understanding of community and the impor-

**Carrie-Ann Robins**

tance of supporting local trade.

She continues to be a passionate supporter of the small business network - particularly women - across the local community, region and abroad, who continue to inspire and support her.

"Surround yourself with people who lift you up and back you, trust your gut, and remember that you don't need to have it all figured out from day one," she said.

"I appreciate the way family, close friends and our community have rallied around us, and the loyalty and encouragement of our customers is something I'll never take for granted."

"I truly love what I do - every challenge, victory and lesson.

"I remain grateful for the journey and am incredibly proud to be part of the Swan Hill community."

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# Regional visionaries

**JENALLE Pye and Kristy Burney are redefining what it means to lead in regional optometry.**

Driven by an ethos of ensuring rural patients have world-class care close to home, the co-owners of Swan Hill and Kerang Optical have decades of clinical and dispensing experience behind them and have transformed the eyecare and eyewear landscape in the Loddon Mallee.

Director and principal optometrist, Jenalle Pye, said the pair were driven to provide best practice care from day one.

"Having both worked within the business for 12 years prior to taking over ownership, we knew what we wanted to change, the quality of service we wanted to provide our patients, and how we could expand in terms of clinical care, optical products, and presentation," Jenalle said.

"From day one, we hit the ground running—and we haven't stopped striving to provide exceptional eyecare and eyewear to our local communities."

Under Jenalle and Kristy's leadership, both clinics have been completely renovated into modern, purpose-built spaces in both Swan Hill and Kerang.

The team has expanded to include 11 industry-educated professionals and both clinics feature



Jenalle Pye is a director, principal optometrist and co-owner of Swan Hill Optical and Kerang Optical.



Kristy Burney is a director, senior optical dispenser and co-owner of Swan Hill and Kerang Optical.

cutting-edge, world class diagnostic and dispensing equipment.

Central to Jenalle and Kristy's business is the mission that the highest-standard of care should be available to everyone.

"Delivering full scope optometry and treating patients from birth to

over 100 years in age, we have always maintained our mantra to keep high quality eyecare and eyewear accessible to all," said Jenalle.

"We do so by continuing to bulk bill patients, and working with various groups to provide subsidised glasses to less privileged commu-

nity members."

There is no doubt community is the core of Swan Hill and Kerang Optical.

"Our team are locals who understand and truly care about the healthcare needs of our community," Jenalle said.

"We work tirelessly to ensure a premium eyecare and eyewear service, despite our rural location."

With the nearest ophthalmologist nearly 200 kilometres away, the clinics frequently manage emergency conditions in-house and provide same-day care for acute patients referred by GPs, pharmacists and hospitals.

Their trusted partnerships with ophthalmologists in Bendigo, Melbourne, and Mildura allow them to co-manage complex cases saving patients time, stress, and travel.

Swan Hill and Kerang Optical's community involvement also extends far beyond the clinic doors, supporting more than 20 local organisations including schools, sporting clubs and Rotary in 2024 alone.

The pair's achievements have been recognised nationally, with Swan Hill recently named a finalist for Independent Practice of the Year 2025—an honour that cements their position among the best independent optometry practices in Australia and New Zealand.

Beyond their business success, Jenalle is deeply committed to edu-

**Jenalle Pye  
Kristy Burney**

cation and giving back.

The clinics host final-year optometry students from The University of Melbourne and Deakin University, as well as medical students from Monash and Charles Sturt Universities.

Jenalle also mentors local emergency department hospital staff and has provided training for GPs on a variety of eye conditions.

"It's rewarding to be part of the education of future practitioners," Jenalle said.

"It's our way of giving back, guiding our profession to grow in the right way and ensuring emerging clinicians have an appreciation of rural healthcare."

Jenalle said success in business comes down to clarity in direction, commitment, and partnership.

"You must be genuine, understand your community and their needs and how they can be best served, create a positive environment for staff and patients, and have a strong point of difference to others in the industry," she advised.

"And if you're considering taking on a business partner, make sure you can work together, have each other's back, can make difficult decisions, and bring different strengths to the business."

## Providing exceptional eyecare and eyewear to our local Swan Hill and Kerang communities

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# Encouraging clients to do their best

**IN 2016, Belinda Batchelor returned to Kerang with more than 20 years of experience in massage, fitness and education — and a vision to build something in her hometown.**

From a few small group classes, she has grown The Fiit Space Kerang into a boutique health and fitness studio that is now a safe and welcoming hub for locals. “The Fiit Space isn’t about cramming as many people in as possible,” Belinda explained. “It’s about creating a safe, welcoming place where every client gets the attention they need, whether they’re managing injuries, coming back from illness, or just wanting a space that feels like theirs.” Her career has been diverse. After graduating from Kerang Technical High School in 1994,

Belinda studied remedial massage in Echuca, travelled across Australia and added to her skills in massage, health, fitness and vocational education. Earlier in her career, she ran a gym, an experience that taught her tough lessons about the exhausting demands of large-scale operations. “That experience showed me that I always wanted to work with smaller groups and more personalised training,” Belinda said. “It’s taken nearly 20 years of coaching and teaching to shape the studio I have today.” The Fiit Space now offers remedial massage, small group fitness, personal training and pilates, while also housing Kerang Balloon Bar and Fresh Flowers. Belinda wears many hats — trainer, mentor, bookkeeper, counsellor and even cleaner —

but at its heart, her role is about encouraging clients to do their best at every stage of life. Challenges have shaped her journey. Securing a suitable premises in a small town was a hurdle, while the pandemic presented the biggest test of all. “Getting through COVID felt like one of my biggest accomplishments,” Belinda said. “The pivots, the scrutiny, the strain on relationships for many — it was heavy. “But the priority was always supporting clients in whatever way they needed, even if it meant jumping on Zoom in the middle of lockdowns.” Not every risk has paid off, such as a retail expansion that coincided with the 2022 floods. “I had to pack it all up and write

off the costs,” she said. “But I’ve never been scared to have a go. You just have to dip your toes in and be ready to change direction if it doesn’t work.” Her advice to other women in business is simple: “If it’s really needed, just do it.” “Start small, focus niche, and don’t let the knockers get to you. “Balance is everything — and having the right support crew around you makes all the difference.”

Belinda Batchelor has grown The Fiit Space Kerang into a boutique health and fitness studio that is now a safe and welcoming hub for locals.

**Belinda Batchelor**



## THE FIIT SPACE KERANG | BELINDA BATCHELOR

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Koondrook Barham feels like home for Riverside Cafe owner Deanna Wallace and her family.

## Stepping outside comfort zone

**PERSISTENCE, hard work and community have taken Deanna Wallace from washing dishes at the family business at age 12 to owning her own cafe before age 30.**

Deanna started working at Barham Riverside Cafe more than four years ago, and is nearing her second anniversary of taking the leap and purchasing the business. “I love the socialisation that comes with working with food and people, I’m a real people person at heart,” she said. “Once I stepped foot in the cafe, started working and getting to know the locals, staff and community, I knew in my heart it was something I really wanted to continue and have for myself.

“I always felt a really nice sense of respect within the walls of the cafe, and the community spirit of our town has always been very welcoming to myself and my family, and for one of the first times in my life I feel like I belong somewhere and I have.” Deanna moved to Cohuna from Warragul a decade ago, before moving to Koondrook four years ago to be closer to the business. “One thing that has really stood out to me since I have been a part of the Barham community is the way everyone around you is so willing to put their hand out and help,” she said. “Everyone feels like family, which is something I cherish and hold very close to my heart. “I’ve had some of the best and

worst and most tiring days, and each customer who walks through the door reminds me why I wanted to be in the cafe and why I show up every day with a smile on my face ready to get on with it.” Deanna’s two children are regular faces to the customers, as are the rest of her family, “My little boy is always floating around, so if you see a child with a costume on or looking like he’s lost, he isn’t - he’s part of the furniture,” she said. “My biggest cheerleader and rock is my partner, Josh, who is always there to fix a pipe or wash a dish, deals with the stress I bring home and always applauds my wins. “My entire family works within the shop, with mum cooking the fish and

chips and bossing everyone around, my sister is usually found talking to the customers, my brother is out the back making pizzas, and my daughter works as a junior in the shop after school and on weekends.” Even though the last two years have been a constant learning experience, Deanna encourages other women to follow their dreams. “I’d be lying if I said I went into being a business owner knowing everything, because I did not,” she said. “I’m still figuring it out, but I’m persistent and I want to achieve great things. “My advice to any woman wanting to step outside of their comfort zone is to just do it - don’t look back in 20 years and regret not taking the chance.”

**Deanna Wallace**

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# Decades of dedication

Helen  
Apostolelis

**FOR more than three decades, Helen Apostolelis has been devoted to serving her community and ensuring her family's legacy continues to thrive.**

Nick's Splendid Shoe Store has been a cornerstone of Kerang for more than half-a-century, and at the heart of its success is Helen.

Raised in Kerang, Helen grew up immersed in the family business.

The store began as a simple shoe repair shop, started by her parents Nick and Stella Giouzellis when they moved to the area.

Over the years, the business evolved into a thriving retail operation, with Helen taking an active role from a young age.

"I grew up always being a part of the business and organically moved into work there as a young adult," Helen said.

After leaving school, she became a partner, alongside her parents.

When they retired 30 years ago, she took on full ownership and has been at the helm ever since.

As the sole owner and operator, Helen is responsible for every aspect of the business, from ordering stock and managing the finances to work-

ing the shop floor and continuing the store's shoe repair services.

Her strong work ethic and deep personal connection to the store are evident in every detail.

"I am so proud to have been given the opportunity to take it over from my parents and I'm proud to own it and work in it every day," Helen said.

"The business has been thriving for 57 years, and that is such an amazing accomplishment for me and my entire family."

Over the years, Helen has navigated a range of challenges, from floods and droughts to the impact of the global pandemic.

But through it all, she has remained resilient, adaptable, and deeply connected to her customer base.

"These occurrences have taught me how to survive during difficult times," Helen said.

"I learnt to very closely manage my expenditure on stock versus my income and have continued improving these skills as my business has grown."

Helen's dedication to her customers and her willingness to take risks have been key to the store's ongoing success.

She's constantly seeking out new brands and products that she believes

will appeal to her loyal clientele, and her personal touch and commitment to service have earned her a special place in the hearts of the Kerang community.

"My parents and family have been a huge support to me along with all of my loyal and loved customers over the years," Helen said.

"I wouldn't be here doing this interview right now without them.

"My success in business is because of them, and I am truly grateful."

For any women considering starting their own business, Helen's advice is both realistic and encouraging.

"It's going to be challenging, and they are going to need to be determined and work extremely hard," she said.

"But it's also very rewarding and comes with a great sense of accomplishment when you are successful at something you feel passionately about."

After 35 years at the helm of Nick's Splendid Shoe Store, Helen continues to serve her customers with the same care and pride that her parents did, ensuring that the family's legacy lives on for generations to come.

Helen Apostolelis is devoted to serving her community and ensuring her family's legacy continues to thrive.

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Julie Davey said retail runs in the family.

# Family store legacy

Julie Davey

**RETAIL** has run in Julie Davey's family for five generations, from her grandfather to her grandchildren.

Julie's father started Loddon Valley Disposals in 1981, and just like her grandchildren, grew up in a retail environment.

From an early age, Julie was helping behind the counter, learning the rhythms of small-town trade and customer care.

Over the years, the store has grown to become a local institution and a true family affair.

"Loddon Valley Disposals is part of the family, basically," Julie said.

"The grandchildren have grown up in the store, the back room has always been a family room.

"Sophie was on the interview panel for one of the first full-time employees we had when she was nine months old.

"The grandchildren know how to stocktake, run the cash register, and serve customers as they became old

enough. They loved it.

"And all the help from my husband, Geoff, and daughters, Tania and Linda, I couldn't have done it without them."

A matriarch of Victoria Street, Julie has always been a shrewd business-woman with her finger on the socio-political pulse.

Earlier this year, Julie stopped ordering machetes, anticipating a government crackdown which came weeks later.

When opera house yabby nets began to face increasing scrutiny, it was a similar story.

"That was another thing where you had to read the vibes of what was happening in the industry," Julie said.

"Lots of interesting stories, and in some cases it's been a big learning curve.

"You adjust with the flow of how things are going, you learn to read the customers and their changes and go with them."

Recently Julie came to the gradual realisation that she needed to retire, but will not be putting her feet up until the store sells.

Julie said along with a strong local clientele, the store sees tourists come through on a daily basis.

"A lot of people have said that to me, they've said, 'Are you just going to shut the door like Joe Blow down the road?' I said, 'I'm sorry, I can't do that - it's not in my makeup'.

"I was brought up in a family of retailers and we don't give in, an empty shop doesn't look good for the town."

With loyal locals and daily visitors from out of town, Loddon Valley Disposals remains a cornerstone of the community and a reflection of Julie's lifelong dedication to retail, family, and the town she loves.

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# A people-first care approach

**WHEN Jess O'Shea started out as a sole trader in 2020, she never imagined that within just a few years she'd be leading a team of more than 35 people and running one of Swan Hill's most diverse service businesses.**

Today, as director of O'Shea Services, she oversees commercial cleaning, car detailing, aged care, carpet cleaning, disability and NDIS support, and trauma and squalor cleaning — all built on the motto: Because we CARE.

For Jess, that phrase was more than branding; it's the foundation of everything she does.

"I wanted to create a business that was genuinely people-first," she said. "For me, it's about care, reliability and community — supporting families, creating jobs and showing that business can be heart-led."

Jess's entrepreneurial leap was driven by a desire for flexibility and the chance to create a workplace that reflected her own values.

Her 13 years in banking provided confidence with cashflow and big-picture decision-making, but managing staff was a whole new challenge.

"Nothing really prepared me for that," she admitted.

"It's been a huge journey of learning and growth."

By 2022, O'Shea Services had 10 staff. Then came one of Jess's boldest moves: buying out a competitor in 2023.

"It was a huge financial and emotional decision," she recalled.

"I used to play Eye of the Tiger every morning on the way to work to keep my courage up."

The merger took 18 months of hard work to unite two teams and two ways of working.

In the end, it strengthened O'Shea's presence, expanded its client base, and proved Jess's belief that bold risks can deliver extraordinary growth.

Finding the right people has been one of her biggest challenges.

"You need team members who share your values," she said.

"But I've also had to learn, it's okay to let the wrong ones go."

Support from mentors, HR professionals, her accountant, and her husband, Rob, has helped her navigate the journey.

Still, she admits business ownership can feel lonely.

Among her proudest milestones have been gaining two local schools as clients within three months and having the confidence to complete the buy-out.

Her advice to other women starting a business?

"Make sure you have strong supports in place," Jess said.

"Take advice but remember the saying: eat the fish and leave the bones. Take what's useful to you and leave the rest."

Jess O'Shea's entrepreneurial leap was driven by a desire for flexibility.

Jess O'Shea



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# Opening doors for other women

Charlotte Broad

**WHEN Charlotte Broad opened the doors to Broad Realty in September 2021, the office was no bigger than her spare bedroom.**

In fact, it was her spare bedroom. Armed with little more than determination, a laptop, and her vision for a more personalised style of real estate, she launched Swan Hill's only female-led agency.

Just four years later, Broad Realty now stands proudly on Campbell Street, employing a growing team and carving out a reputation for premium marketing and customer-focused service in both residential and commercial real estate.

"It all started because I could see a gap in the market," Charlotte said.

"I wanted to create an agency that focused on high-level, customer-centric service — the kind of experience I'd want if I were in my client's shoes."

Charlotte's path into real estate began young.

At just 19, she took on her first role on the Mornington Peninsula before life led her north to Swan Hill, where she married her husband, Elliot.

Working with a local agency gave her valuable insights, but she quickly felt the itch to build something of her own.

"I remember Elliot saying one night, 'Why don't you open your

own real estate agency?'" Charlotte recalled.

"I thought he was crazy. My first reaction was, 'What if I can't pull it off?' And he just said, 'Well, what if you do?' That simple line stuck with me. I decided to take the leap."

The leap was no small risk. At just 25, newly married, and new to town, Charlotte faced not only the demands of running a business but also perceptions about her age.

"Being under 30 and female in a traditionally male-dominated industry wasn't easy," she admitted.

"But I've been encouraged by so many locals who gave me a chance and backed my vision."

Her vision has since been recognised nationally.

Earlier this year, Charlotte was named a finalist in the Real Estate Business Awards for Young Gun of the Year — a category flooded with submissions from across the country.

"To be considered among the best up-and-coming agents in Australia was surreal," she said.

"It felt like validation that the risks and the hard work have been worth it."

The early days weren't glamorous. Charlotte and her first employee worked side-by-side at home, juggling sales, property management, and the ever-growing list of tasks that

come with running a business.

"One thing I wasn't expecting was just how many hats you have to wear as a business owner," she said.

"You can't be an expert in everything."

"I've learned how important it is to surround yourself with a strong support network — accountants, advisors, and, of course, my amazing team."

That team, she believed, was at the heart of Broad Realty's success.

Along with being part of the Agents' Agency Network, Charlotte credits collaboration and community support as key to her growth.

Asked what advice she'd give other women looking to start a business, she doesn't hesitate: "Know your 'why'. Some days are tough, and having a strong sense of purpose keeps you going. And don't think you have to do it all yourself — building a business is a team effort."

For Charlotte, the 'why' has always been simple: people and property.

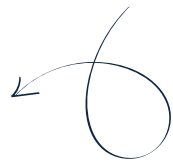
"I love helping people step into the next chapter of their lives," she said.

"That's what keeps me passionate about this industry."

"And to be able to do it here in Swan Hill, with a team I'm so proud of, is more rewarding than I ever imagined."

Armed with little more than determination, a laptop, and her vision for a more personalised style of real estate, Charlotte Broad launched Swan Hill's only female-led agency.

# WHAT'S MY PROPERTY WORTH?



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# Strong foundations

**FOR 18 years, Katherine Bissett has helped people in the Swan Hill region regain strength, mobility and confidence through tailored health and rehabilitation programs.**

An accredited exercise physiologist, Katherine launched KB Exercise Physiology in 2007 after realising there were no local opportunities in her field. "At the time, the hospital didn't employ exercise physiologists and there were no private practice roles," she said. "I saw the need, so I decided to start my own practice."

Her first consulting rooms were within Swan Hill Physiotherapy, later at Swan Hill Medical Group, before she and her husband purchased premises in McCallum Street in 2017.

The move created a purpose-built studio with an accessible rehabilitation space.

Before returning home, Katherine gained valuable experience in private

practice in Queensland and at Bendigo Health.

"Working in Queensland gave me insight into how a private practice worked," she said.

"But, I learnt most of my post-operative patient management through a very experienced team in Bendigo."

Looking back, she said her greatest lessons have come from patients.

"If you sit back and listen, you learn so much," Katherine said.

"My older patients, especially, have offered wisdom and guidance that has stayed with me."

Those personal connections have become central to Katherine's business.

"In a small town, you form friendships with patients," she said.

"After 18 years, I can honestly admit this is one of the reasons I love my job and thoroughly enjoy the many deep conversations and support I provide these patients during different life stages."



KB Exercise Physiology founder Katherine Bissett is helping people in the Swan Hill region regain strength, mobility and confidence.

Through word of mouth, Katherine's practice grew steadily and now supports up to 100 patients a week, with clients travelling from Kerang, Wyche-

**Katherine Bissett**

proof, and Balranald.

Her mother, a local GP, has been a mentor and collaborator, while her husband continues to play an active role in the practice.

Balancing work and family has been another highlight.

"Running my own business allows me to be there for my children's school and sport commitments," Katherine said.

"I don't miss many events, and I'm grateful for such understanding patients."

Reflecting on her journey, Katherine encourages other women in business.

"It's challenging but rewarding," she said.

"If you're passionate, adaptable, and willing to put in the work, it's absolutely worth it."

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Tania Kirby at Up, Up 'N Away Balloons and Prop Hire won Best Display at the 2018 Echuca Wedding Expo.

## Balloon business boom

**SINCE getting her start selling kids balloons at markets while in search of a change in career a decade ago, Tania Kirby has become an award-winning display stylist.**

After a few requests to decorate birthdays, Tania took the leap and invested in learning the craft of decorating with balloons and props.

"We didn't have large backdrop set ups in Swan Hill and I wanted to bring it here," she said.

"I enjoy seeing the delight in people's faces, young and old, when they see their balloons, and to hear that they loved my displays."

"Even if we are in a small country town, we can offer the same beautiful balloons and backdrops here."

"I hope to be able to continue offering beautiful balloons and backdrops in Swan Hill for many more years to come - I'm almost 54, so I plan to continue working for at least another 20 years."

Tania won Best Display at the 2018 Echuca

Wedding Expo, and was runner-up at the Party Stylist of the Year Award in 2022, attending the gala awards dinner in Sydney.

"I didn't realise you can go to classes and get trained by other professionals to create beautiful balloons, and I am now on the Australian Balloon Association Committee as a secretary and help organise trainings all around Australia for members," she said.

Tania is the owner, operator, creator and designer, but she has been able to call on support when she needed it.

"It's a whole family affair, with my son and husband helping me out," she said.

"I have got support and advice from my insurance company and my accountant, and I chat to other women in the balloon industry to share ideas and how to run a successful small business."

"My inspiration comes from other balloon professionals around the world, I watch on social media what they are creating and that inspires me to create beautiful pieces here too."

Tania has continued to learn to overcome

and adapt to the challenges of running a small business.

"Prices of helium increased during the peak of Covid, and, of course, being able to stay open was challenging at that time," she said.

"Creating a website to allow online ordering and offer contactless delivery or pickup options was a challenge."

"I had training in retail, hospitality, administration and fitness, and I think these past careers have guided me, and being a people person transferred to this business easily."

For those beginning their foray into small business ownership, Tania counsels an eyes-wide-open approach.

"Goal setting is important, so you don't get overwhelmed with trying to achieve everything at once," she said.

"Chat to your accountant and plan out how much you will spend to start and set your goals for each month."

**Tania Kirby**



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# Building hope

**Bec Poyner**

**FOR Bec Poyner, building Chasing Hope was never just about starting a business — it was about creating something meaningful for those who needed real, hands-on support**

Two years ago the business owner pivoted careers with the mission to allow people of all abilities to live their best possible lives.

The bold leap gave life to Chasing Hope — named after her two children, Chase and Hope — a local business inspired by Bec's desire to make a lasting difference in the community.

"I wanted something more meaningful, less paperwork and more action for those who need support," she said.

"It's both the most stressful role, yet the most rewarding role I've undertaken."

"Within weeks my client case load was far too much for only myself and I hated turning people who needed the support away."

"So I employed two casual staff and weeks later my first full-time staff member."

Bec worked "around-the-clock" during her first year, and as Chasing Hope grew so too did its impact in the community.

Today, Chasing Hope has grown to 20 staff, employed a manager to oversee day-to-day management and two full-time administration positions.

One of the business woman's proudest moments came recently with the completion of the Chasing Hope Hub — a space where clients come together to build critical social and life skills in a safe, warm environment.

"Our whole team and clients have assisted in making our hub what it is and I couldn't be any more proud of what we've produced," Bec said.

"But it's not just the facilities alone, I think we have created a very inclusive place for not just our clients, but also their families and our staff."

"Every client we have feels a sense of belonging when they are a part of the Chasing Hope family, that probably does more to assist them in building their capacity than anything materialistic ever could."

A renaissance woman, Bec's previous and varied professional experiences were aces up her sleeve.

"My previous role as a real estate agent definitely helped in acquiring property for our Chasing Hope Hub, our respite and assisted employment

properties," she said.

"It also helped me to develop a deeper business and financial acumen, every experience prior has led me to where I am now."

Bec said success isn't measured in profit margins or titles — it's found in purpose, connection, and community.

"Often it's the little wins of our clients within this industry," she said.

"What seems like minor breakthroughs to most are actually huge and have a major impact on our clients and their families' lives."

Bec's advice to others dreaming of starting their own venture reflects an inherently tenacious spirit.

"If you have a vision, passion for that vision, resilience to not crumble under pressure and humility to learn from your mistakes, you can get through anything," she said.

From one woman's leap of faith to a team of 17, Chasing Hope stands as a testament to what happens when courage, compassion, and conviction come together.

**“Our whole team and clients have assisted in making our hub what it is and I couldn't be any more proud of what we've produced,**

Picture by Brodie Nicholas - VISION VIBES BY BRODIE

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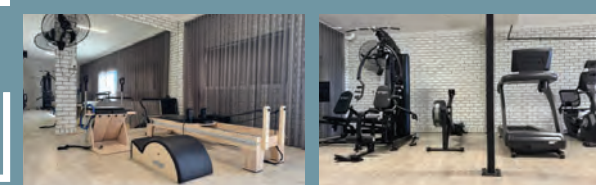


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Rebecca Tiernan realised her dream after purchasing Arcade Cafe and rebranding it to Beck's Place this year.

# A lifelong dream

**WHEN Rebecca Tiernan purchased Arcade Cafe in Swan Hill earlier this year, it wasn't just a business venture, it was the realisation of a lifelong dream.**

Now rebranded as Beck's Place, the café continues to be a sought after establishment.

Beck said it marked the beginning of an exciting new chapter.

"It's satisfying to know that something I've always wanted, I've achieved," she said.

"Whether it succeeds or fails, I'm having a go.

"All the hard work is paying off, and with that, I feel fantastic."

Beck's leap into business ownership was sparked after years of hard work and the desire to be her own boss.

"I was working long hours for someone else, doing pretty much what I would be doing if I owned a business," Beck said.

With family, friends, and a network of

local business owners rallying around her, Beck navigated the transition with confidence and reassurance.

"They were all really supportive," she said.

"It's a huge deal to take on a business on your own, but I've had people around me with experience, people you just can't buy advice from."

The combination of two decades at Aldi and time spent in Melbourne's bustling cafes and restaurants has profoundly influenced Beck's outlook.

"It was all about productivity and efficiency," Beck said.

"That shaped me, you're always looking for a job before it needs to be done."

Customer service is at the heart of Beck's Place.

"I like people to walk out and be happy with how they've been treated," Beck said.

"It's important to me to give everyone a good experience."

Beck's connection to the community runs deep.

**Rebecca Tiernan**

Many loyal customers carried over from the previous owner, and Beck encourages feedback through a suggestion box at the cafe.

"The community and customers mean everything," she said.

"I'm really grateful they've given me a go and keep coming back for more.

"I've got my own regulars as well now. It's really good.

"Everyone's been really supportive."

Balancing entrepreneurship and family life has its challenges, but Beck's passion keeps her going.

"It's a challenge but you just work, you just do it," Beck said.

"And half the battle is won, because I love what I do now."

At Beck's Place, it's all about working hard, embracing support, and, most importantly, spreading joy, one satisfied customer at a time.



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Leane Swinnerton is the heart and soul of The Rustic Ivy florist.

# Life in full bloom

**FOR nearly three decades, Leane Swinnerton has brought colour, joy and comfort to the Swan Hill community through her creative touch as a florist.**

As the sole owner of The Rustic Ivy, Leane's journey began long before she opened the doors to her own shop.

"Through Swan Hill College, while I was doing Year 11, I actually did one day a week through a vocational education program and knew floristry was what I wanted to do," she recalls.

"I got weekend work straight away, left school and took it on full-time."

That early decision has blossomed into a lifelong career.

Since 1996, Leane has been creating bespoke bouquets and arrangements that reflect her signature vintage-

inspired style — a love for flowers that look timeless, textured, and full of character.

Customers have followed Leane from shop-to-shop throughout her floristry career for her stunning bouquets and warm presence.

"I like a more old-fashioned style — things that look aged and preserved rather than modern and sleek," she said.

"I kind of follow my own unique style that hopefully stands out"

Leane recently took the proud step of purchasing her own shop in the Swan Hill North shopping precinct.

"That was a huge, very proud moment," she said.

"My family and friends were so supportive.

"You just never know if you're doing the right thing, but it's been the best

**Leane Swinnerton**

thing I've done."

Over the years, the business owner has watched generations of families celebrate life's milestones.

Leane laughed and said she may have played a small part in saving a couple of marriages, and also helped set a few up.

"You see couples when they first start dating and you know it's getting serious because they buy flowers," she said.

"Then they come and see me for engagements, weddings, after they have children and other life milestones.

"The thought of giving fresh flowers just makes everyone happy on different levels.

"Being part of these special moments in people's lives brings me closer to my community, and is just one of the reasons I adore my job."



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# Trailblazer in rural healthcare

AUSTRALIA'S first Advanced Sports Osteopath, Louise Bibby, leads multiple health and fitness ventures across the state.

A trailblazer in rural healthcare, her dynamic leadership and community-first approach are changing the way health services are delivered in remote areas.

Spanning clinical practice, rural health, leadership, education and mentoring, Louise's work is deeply rooted in service and impact.

"I'm driven by connection, growth, and creating opportunities for people and communities to thrive," Louise said.

Today, she stands at the helm of a growing network of health and fitness ventures across northern Victoria, including Central Mallee Health, Central Mallee Fitness, and the Osteo Sports Network.

Louise's journey began at just 22 when she returned to her hometown of Berrinlock after years away at boarding school and university.

"After coming home, I realised my community still didn't have access to allied healthcare," she said.

"So, in 2010, I opened Central Mallee Health in a disused maternal and child health centre."

That small beginning has grown into a network of clinics across Swan Hill, Sea Lake, Birchip and Kerang.

Through its outreach Outreach Osteo program, Louise and her team now provide services across 40,000



Louise Bibby is changing the way health services are delivered in remote areas.

square kilometres.

In 2018, Louise founded OSN, offering osteopaths access to mentoring,

professional development and sports pathways.

This year, OSN is hosting Australia's

first sports medicine summit for osteopaths, bringing together surgeons, physicians and performance leaders from around the country.

Recognising the need for accessible fitness in small towns, Louise launched Central Mallee Fitness 24/7 in 2023, creating a space for community connection and wellbeing.

Louise became Australia's first advanced sports osteopath in 2020, was named Osteopath of the Year at the 2024 Australian Allied Health Awards, and serves as vice chair of Sports Medicine Australia's Victorian State Council.

Louise said she is most proud of the work behind the scenes.

"I am proud of the success and application of action towards goals," she said.

"Of building multiple businesses, earning national awards and contributing to my profession before the age of 40.

"Grit, grind, resilience, energy, momentum and speed have driven everything.

"Most days you just work hard, and some days it all just works."

Through LouBibby.com, she works as a high-energy mentor and eDISC facilitator, helping teams build strong cultures through conscious communication and behavioural insight.

She also leads grassroots initiatives like Stronger Foundations, youth athlete programs, school partnerships, community events, and work experience opportunities.

Louise  
Bibby

“Go where you're needed, stay where you matter, and lead like it's contagious

"Every project builds connection, participation, and wellbeing in the Mallee," she said.

Louise's advice for women in business is simple.

"Back yourself early," she said.

"Build networks that energise you and find mentors who see your potential before you do.

"Leadership is about bringing people with you and creating spaces where others feel they belong."

Looking ahead, 2025 is all about growth.

"I'm focused on expanding OSN nationally," she said.

"Developing leadership education, and helping teams become confident and high-performing.

"The goal is to keep creating spaces that elevate others."

Her motto captures it all.

"Go where you're needed, stay where you matter, and lead like it's contagious," she said.

"It's not what you say, it's how you make people feel that defines your impact."

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# Fitting rural women

**PERSONAL** stylist Cathy Ballis has made her love for fashion a career, building **Styled by Cathy** to empower women to feel confident and comfortable in their own skin.

With the loyalty and trust of her clients, training and resources from Intimo, the encouragement of her family and friends, and the support of fellow stylists and local business owners, Cathy is inspired to keep growing and improving.

Over the past decade, Cathy has grown Intimo from a bra-fitting service into a full personal styling experience—and she's proud to have earned the confidence and trust of her clients along the way.

"I guide my clients to find the perfect fit and style, curate lingerie and clothing capsules, manage day-to-day operations and create a welcoming space where rural women feel confident, beautiful and supported," she said.

"Having my own private studio filled with lingerie and clothing in such a wide range of styles and sizes, right here in a small country town, is phenomenal.

"I'm so proud, and honestly still a little in awe, that I get to do what I love every day.

"Knowing that women feel comfortable coming to me for guidance for lingerie, sportswear, or building a capsule wardrobe is incredibly rewarding and makes all the hard work worthwhile."

Cathy gained her foundational understanding of managing accounts and admin with her husband's business and her own former business Coffee Bank in Pyramid Hill.

"Those experiences taught me resilience, customer service, and how to juggle the many hats that come with business ownership," she said.

"Running your own business isn't just about selling a product or service - it's about learning to back yourself,

adapt to change, and wear every hat from bookkeeper to marketer to cheerleader.

"Find something you truly love then make it your own.

"When I first started as a bra fitter, I was simply looking for an income without the nine to five grind.

"My passion for fashion naturally evolved into personal styling, and Intimo's new structure to open our own studios and the opportunity to create something unique for my community was the perfect blend."

"It's okay not to have all the answers at the start, you learn as you go and that's part of the adventure.

"There will always be challenges, but when you love what you do and it has your personal touch, it doesn't just feel like work, it feels like purpose, and that is what will keep you going on the hard days and make the good days even sweeter."



Cathy Ballis

Cathy Ballis helps rural women feel confident in their skin.



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# Beauty, business and breakthroughs

**SALLY** Wilson still chuckles at the memory of her first attempts at beauty therapy — practising on friends and family with results she describes as "a little questionable."

"I don't think I'd want anyone to see my earlier work," she admits with a laugh.

"But I loved learning, and the more I practised, the more I knew it was something I wanted to pursue seriously."

That spark of passion has since grown into Skin Essence, the Koon-drook salon Sally has steered for more than a decade.

She began at the business 12 years ago, working as a therapist, before boldly purchasing it just 18 months later.

"It was the biggest risk I've ever taken," she said.

"I was young, I didn't know the ins and outs of running a business, but I

trusted my gut.

"Looking back, I'm so grateful I did."

Owning and managing a salon has been more than just treatments and bookings.

Sally said the role has taught her lessons she never expected.

"I wasn't expecting how much running a business would teach me about myself," she reflects.

"Patience, trusting your instincts, and knowing that mistakes aren't failures — they're part of the journey."

Her resilience was tested during the Covid lockdowns, when sudden closures forced endless rescheduling and months of uncertainty.

"It was incredibly challenging," she said.

"But it also reminded me how supportive our community is, and how important it is to stay flexible."

Support has been key to the salon's success.

Alongside her loyal staff, Sally has

relied on the encouragement of family and friends, as well as the guidance of business coaches and mentors.

That network has helped her not only survive the difficult times but also celebrate the wins — like marking 10 years as owner in 2024.

"That anniversary was a really proud moment," she said.

"Owning a business was never part of my original plan, but it's grown into one of the most rewarding parts of my life."

Despite the challenges, Sally wouldn't trade the journey.

Her advice for other women considering business ownership is short and certain: "If it's something you are passionate about — you cannot fail."

Skin Essence may have started with uneven brows and shaky polish jobs, but under Sally's care it has become a success story — built on passion, persistence, and plenty of heart.



Sally Wilson

Sally Wilson has steered her Koon-drook-based salon for more than a decade.

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# Big risk paid off

**AINSLEY O'Bryan and husband Dan strive to deliver old-fashioned country hospitality for guests from around the country and overseas at their Holiday Park, BIG4 Riverside Swan Hill.**

The couple's efforts over the past 14 years of owning the business have earned the park numerous awards, including third place at the Victorian Tourism Awards in 2015 and winning the marketing award for exemplary promotion and market engagement at the Victorian Caravan Parks Association in 2022.

Mrs O'Bryan took the leap to move away from her friends and family in Ballarat to join Dan in his return home to Swan Hill to successfully tender for the holiday park in 2011.

"It was the best risk we ever took," she said.

"There are many challenges in owning a business like ours, big and small,



Ainsley O'Bryan traded Ballarat for the river lifestyle 14 years ago.

but together Dan and I make a great team and we have wonderful staff who take pride in their positions.

"Together, I feel we overcome many challenges that we face.

"Owning and running a holiday park is certainly hard work, there are so many aspects to it including, HR, social media, gardening and landscaping, bins and barbecues, housekeeping and building new facilities to name just a few.

"The business is open literally every day of the year so you don't get a lot of downtime, but it's been so rewarding and I really enjoy working with my husband.

"You have to be prepared for the unexpected and try to make every guest feel welcome."

The couple have weathered the devastation of Covid and the 2022 floods on tourism.

"What a nightmare Covid was - running a holiday park there are obviously certain times of the year that you rely on to get you through the quiet times, for example the Easter school holidays," she said.

"The first lockdown occurred just

before Easter of 2020, so it was a dreadful time for so many businesses and left us feeling confused and defeated.

Other challenges include the floods - we weren't flooded as such but directly impacted because roads were closed so guests couldn't get to Swan Hill.

As a Registered Nurse with a love for hearing about people's lives and experiences, Mrs O'Bryan has flourished in the social aspect of her role as co-owner and manager since the couple won the tender for the holiday park.

"I love hearing about people's lives and experiences, so it was a fairly natural process when entering this type of industry because our guests love a chat," she said.

"I have enjoyed meeting people staying at our park from all around Australia and many other countries."

In between operating BIG4 Riverside and starting a family, Mrs O'Bryan

**Ainsley O'Bryan**

created her second business Bloom Medispa.

"We don't have family here in Swan Hill so I needed to find something in the nursing field that could allow me to be flexible with my work hours, I saw a gap in the cosmetic nursing market, so I studied and created Bloom Medispa, which allowed me to work my own hours whilst looking after my young children and running the park.

"I sold Bloom a year ago to two fabulous local women and it has been lovely to see it flourish under their ownership.

"If you're thinking of purchasing or starting a business, do some research, see if there is a gap in the market, if it's something you are passionate about and believe that it could thrive, go for it."

Unwind after the final whistle on the banks of the Murray



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# Expanding the family legacy



Vince and Tina Musico with The Block judge Darren Palmer during their Sydney trip, celebrating a decade of Meir.

**TINA Musico's goal since taking the reins of family-owned business Conidi Tiles and Lighting a decade ago is helping customers achieve their dream home.**

Relocating to their purpose-built Campbell Street showroom and warehouse in 2019 has only made that goal easier to achieve, with more room to expand their range and ease of service to tradespeople.

It was designed to showcase their products to inspire their customers and allows for user-friendly access for bulk product movement.

"It was the best thing we have ever done, it's really paid off in making our business more easy to run," she said.

"We really have grown since relocating, with the support of our tradies.

"We now stock bathware and tapware, vanities, kitchen sinks, we do it all now, because our location is big enough.

"A surprising amount of people have called us a one-stop-shop."

Conidi Tiles and Lightning was founded by Grace and Michael Conidi in Lake Boga in 1973 and moved into Swan Hill in 1982.

Tina has worked for the business since she finished high school.

In that time she has developed experience and passion for design, and an eye for quality.

Tina was joined by husband and co-owner Vince in 1993, who shares her passion for quality products, advice and service.

"I've been doing this for a long time because I love what I do, I'll be here until I retire," Tina said.

"We pride ourselves on in-depth technical knowledge and understanding the current trends, while still giving advice on the practicality of products.

"Our focus is to listen to what the customer wants and help guide their decisions.

**Tina Musico**

"Our goal is to be the best at what we do, and our growth over the years proves we must be doing something right."

Tina and Vince are proactive in staying connected with suppliers and industry, and recently travelled to Sydney for supplier Meir's 10 years' celebration.

"I'm particular about our suppliers, and we only stock products that are of a high standard across our range," she said.

"We provide exceptional customer service and premium quality tiles from Australia, Europe, Asia and South America.

"The trip to Sydney was a great time, and we go to a lot of events like that where we are able to keep up-to-date with everything and bring that knowledge home."

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# Driving to success

**ERIN Decker is proof that you don't need industry experience to make a meaningful impact in business - you just need determination, heart, and a great team.**

As the co-owner of Autobarn Swan Hill, Erin has spent the past seven years building a thriving automotive retail business, alongside her husband Nigel, while raising two children - Zara, 15 and Hugh, 7.

The 38-year-old has already carved out a successful career, yet her path into the automotive world wasn't a typical one.

"I had no prior experience in the automotive industry," she said.

Before stepping into Autobarn, she spent eight years working in her parents' family business, gaining first-hand experience in customer service, operations, and the day-to-day realities of running a small enterprise.

That foundation empowered her to

take on a bold new challenge in 2018 - joining forces with Nigel to purchase the business from his parents and shape their shared future.

Today, the duo leads a team of five dedicated employees.

Together, they make it their mission to deliver exceptional customer service to every person that walks through the door.

One of Erin's proudest moments came in 2021, when Autobarn Swan Hill was named Franchise of the Year, a recognition that validated years of commitment, teamwork, and community support.

"That award meant everything," she said.

"It showed us that what we're doing matters."

Behind the scenes, Erin credits her support network - family, friends, and her team - for helping her juggle business trips, parenting, and the

unpredictable demands of entrepreneurship.

"We're so grateful to have our village to lean on," she said.

Although the Covid years brought significant challenges, Erin and her team emerged stronger and more resilient, making them more confident in their ability to overcome even the toughest obstacles.

Retail is a dynamic, fast-paced industry, but Erin wouldn't have it any other way.

She thrives on the hustle and the fact no two days are the same.

"I love being part of a team, leading them and watching them grow," she said.

As she continues steering Autobarn Swan Hill toward new milestones, Erin remains a powerful example of what's possible when women take the wheel, no matter where they start.



**Erin Decker**

Erin Decker has established a successful career in the automotive industry.

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## On the right track



Rhonda Comitti has built her business on the resilience and grit she honed over two decades in the saddle.

**NOT many accountants can say they've galloped down Flemington straight on New Year's Day, but for Swan Hill's Rhonda Comitti, the racetrack came before the spreadsheets.**

The former jockey turned registered tax agent has built her business, Right Track Accounting Solutions, on the resilience and grit she honed over two decades in the saddle.

Originally from Ballarat, Rhonda moved to Swan Hill in 2006 with her husband, Ben, and continued juggling race riding while studying accounting.

At the time, her life was a whirlwind: riding trackwork at dawn, working at an accounting firm by day, and cradling her first child at night — all while hitting the books.

"I rode in races for 21 years and managed over 200 winners," she said, reeling off career highlights like the Swan Hill Cup in 1995, the Manangatang Cup, and even a Flemington win on New Year's Day.

"It was a tough industry, but it gave me the dedication I rely on now in business."

By December 2010, with her second child on

the way, Rhonda hung up the silks.

Retirement from racing didn't mean slowing down.

Within months, she'd finished her Master of Commerce in Professional Accounting, later adding a Certificate IV in Training and Assessing.

She even taught accounting and bookkeeping at SuniTafe, alongside running tax seminars for apprentice jockeys across Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania.

In 2016, she officially launched Right Track Accounting Solutions, a name that cheekily nods to her past life on the track while pointing clients toward financial clarity.

Working from a newly built home office — with her mum and a part-time assistant on the team — Rhonda now supports clients across Australia with everything from tax and BAS to bookkeeping.

But her toughest victory came off the field.

Last year, Rhonda was diagnosed with breast cancer.

Despite gruelling treatment, she kept her business running.

**Rhonda Comitti**

Now cancer-free, she said she's focused on growth and grateful for the support of colleagues, clients and family.

"Working from home, the biggest challenge has been learning how to switch off," she admitted.

"But what I've learned from both racing and business is that you've got to be resilient and keep moving forward."

She still keeps one hoof in the industry that shaped her, counting jockeys and trainers among her clients, and occasionally sharing her story at community events like BPW Swan Hill, Probus and Rotary.

Her advice to other women starting out in business is simple but telling: "Look out for each other, have each other's back — even if you're in a competing industry."

For Rhonda, whether it's the racetrack or the balance sheet, it's always been about staying on the right track.

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# Capturing connection

**FOR Nicole Featherby, photography is far more than taking photos, it's about building lifelong friendships and connecting with people.**

Her mission is to create a space for everyone to pause and reflect on special moments that can be cherished, whether capturing a family welcoming a new baby, documenting milestones, preserving everyday memories, or helping a business.

Born and raised in Swan Hill, Nicole's creative journey began early.

Nicole and her siblings often played with their grandmother's film camera and her mother's video recorder, planting the seeds for what would one day become her life's calling.

"Throughout school, I never knew what I wanted to do," Nicole said.

"There's so much pressure at that age to choose a career path."

After finishing Year 12, Nicole worked full-time at Holt's Auto Service, before spending eight years as a dental assistant at Swan Hill Dental Group.

She studied education briefly, but soon realised her true passion lay elsewhere.

In 2018, she purchased her first DSLR camera, and by early 2019 she'd launched her business on Facebook and Instagram.

What began as a side hobby quickly evolved into a full-time career.

Nicole now specialises in family, newborn, wedding, commercial, and

real estate photography.

But her work involves more than pressing the shutter.

"Taking the photos is one thing," she said.

"Then there's creative direction, styling, client communication, social media, and finances."

Her editing process is where she said "the magic really happens," and can take hours behind the scenes.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Nicole used her camera to bring people together.

She launched Feat the Front Door, and photographed more than 410 families and essential workers on their doorsteps.

"I wanted to create something we could look back on, to laugh, smile, and remember what we lived through together," she said.

The project made Nicole a familiar face around Swan Hill.

"People stop me in the street or supermarket now to say hello, that's something I'll always cherish," she said.

Balancing a business with motherhood is no small feat.

With two daughters, Hennie and Bobbi, Nicole's business revolves around long hours, late nights and weekend work.

"I gave up the typical nine to five life for something that's 24/7, but I wouldn't change it," she said.

"The costs of running your own business are huge, not just financially but personally too."



Photographer Nicole Featherby enjoys capturing life's moments and building lasting connections through her lens.

**Nicole Featherby**

**“** *I wanted to create something we could look back on, to laugh, smile, and remember what we lived through together.*

Despite her professional success, Nicole's proudest role is being a mum.

"Becoming a mum is without doubt the hardest and most rewarding job you could ever do," she said.

"Brent and I are incredibly fortunate to have people around us who make it possible to pursue our careers."

Now working from her own studio at home, Nicole enjoys the flexibility to spend more time with her girls, while continuing to grow her brand.

Her story is a reminder that success isn't just about the images captured but the relationships she builds along the way.

"I say it every day, I love what I do," she said.

"The people I meet, the stories I get to tell, the little snippets of life I help preserve, that's what makes it all worth it."

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Sister Kode is about celebrating identity and style.

# Celebrating identity and style

**WHEN Belinda Vallance opened her little shop in December 2019, she had a baby on her hip, three young children at home, and absolutely no fashion experience.**

"I was a Woolies checkout chick and worked in plant nurseries," she said.  
"I had no idea what I was doing.  
"I still don't — I just learn on the fly."  
That leap into the unknown became Sister Kode, a thriving boutique built on resilience, family support and a determination to give local women what she once wished existed for herself.  
Belinda's journey began under the name Mumma Valley, a maternity store inspired by her own experiences of motherhood.

But she quickly realised the brand wasn't connecting.  
"People would walk past and say, 'I'm not pregnant, I don't need to go in there.' It didn't translate," she said.  
So, Belinda rebranded.  
Sister Kode was born — a name that pays tribute to her three daughters, her son Takoda, and the idea of women lifting each other up.  
"It just felt right," she said.  
"Sister Kode is about celebrating identity and style, and about women supporting women, instead of tearing each other down."  
The timing was brutal.  
Just months after opening, the COVID pandemic forced her to close her doors before she'd even had a chance to build a customer base.  
Instead of folding, she adapted —

delivering orders herself around town while homeschooling her children.  
"I've come so close to closing the doors so many times," she admits.  
"I even spoke to a financial advisor about it once.  
"But he told me, 'Don't you dare.'  
"And honestly, every time I think about giving up, there's nothing else I'd want to do."  
Her persistence has paid off.  
Sister Kode now enjoys a loyal following, and for Belinda, seeing her pieces worn out in the community remains the ultimate reward.  
"When you spot someone in town wearing something from your shop, it's the best feeling," she said.  
"Clothes are part of your identity.  
"When you're wearing something that makes you feel like you, then you

really feel like yourself."  
It hasn't been an easy road — social media demands, economic pressures and the constant juggle of business and family test her daily.  
But Belinda believes those risks have built her resilience. So much so, she has moved into a bigger space, still nestled in Chapman Street.  
"Opening the shop in the first place was the biggest risk of all, but it's paid off," she said.  
"My family has never given up on me, and now I get to show my kids what's possible if you just keep going."  
"If you believe in it, go for it. Give it everything.  
"And if it doesn't work out, it's not a failure — you gave it everything, and that's the only way you'll ever know."

Belinda Vallance

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# More than a store

**WALKING through the door of Home Life Children's Boutique can feel like a warm hug after a long day.**

It's a carefully curated community atmosphere business owner Nadene Simpson prides herself on.  
"I love hearing customers say our shop is a calm and happy place to visit," she said.  
"That sense of connection and joy really drives me."  
"My dream was to continue creating a calm, beautiful space for families to find quality clothing, toys, and gifts for their little ones.

Nadene Simpson has curated a stunning in-store family atmosphere.

"I wanted to continue bringing together brands I wish had been around when my girls were little beautiful, thoughtful, and practical pieces that feel special but can be loved every day."  
Wanting to share more than just the store's products, Nadene began creating online videos which have received tens of thousands of views.  
"I wanted to show the heart of our boutique," she said.  
"I started experimenting with short videos to capture the fun, warmth, and everyday moments of life at Home Life.  
"The response was incredible, and yes, reels have definitely helped grow our business.  
"They showcase who we are — everyday people who love a laugh, enjoy having fun, work hard, and truly value

the connections with everyone who visits or engages with us online.  
"I get such a thrill when someone pops their head into the store, laughing and say, 'I love your reels?' I feel like a celebrity in the supermarket — and a little embarrassed."  
Nadene said Home Life Children's Boutique is a store for families, from her family.  
"I'm incredibly supported by the women and family in my life — my daughters, nieces and sister often step in to help at the store," she said.  
"My staff are not just employees but amazing, hardworking women who bring warmth and energy to the boutique.  
"Their encouragement and teamwork make all the difference, and I feel so grateful to be surrounded by them."

Nadene Simpson



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# Chase your dreams

Kyarna Nalder

Kyarna Nalder has grown a thriving cleaning and car detailing enterprise, driven by determination, strategic vision, and a genuine passion for transforming spaces into pristine, inviting environments.

As the founder and managing director of KLN, she's also a proud mum to two daughters, aged eight and four - balancing entrepreneurship with motherhood in a way that inspires those around her.

Kyarna launched her business in 2020 - right in the midst of the global Covid-19 pandemic - turning a time of uncertainty into a bold entrepreneurial beginning.

Starting out with little more than determination and a mop in hand, what began as a small, solo venture quickly grew into a thriving business.

"It all started with me, cleaning homes and working out of my garage," she said.

In just five years, KLN has grown to employ 74 staff members, offering meaningful work and financial stability to dozens of families.

It's a milestone Kyarna considers one of her greatest achievements.

"Giving people the opportunity to work and support their families, that's something I'll always consider one of my proudest achievements," she said.

While she had no prior experience in the automotive or cleaning industries,

**"**You can achieve what you imagine, and so much more.  
*It's a big wide world, if you have a dream, go out there and chase it.***"**

business ownership wasn't entirely unfamiliar.

Growing up, she worked alongside her grandparents in pubs and caravan parks, gaining early insight into customer service and the realities of running a business.

Those formative years shaped her approach, but much of KLN's success has come from learning on the go.

However, the path hasn't been without its challenges.

"I face challenges every single day, but overcoming them has become part of my routine," Kyarna said, acknowledging that the demands of running a business can often feel relentless.

"The pressure never really switches off," she said.

"Even when I try to take a break, my mind drifts back to the business."

Yet, overcoming those daily hurdles has become part of her rhythm, and the

rewards have been worth it.

In 2024, KLN reached a major milestone by expanding beyond Swan Hill and opening a new branch in Mildura.

That same year, Kyarna took another bold step by purchasing a car wash.

KLN Car Detailing and Wash enabled Kyarna to diversify the business, while staying true to its core values of quality, care, and community.

Behind her success is a strong support network - her dedicated staff, a trusted business mentor, and her family, who've all played vital roles in helping her keep everything moving forward.

Reflecting on her journey, Kyarna wouldn't change a thing.

Her advice to other women considering entrepreneurship is simple but powerful:

Make a plan and chase it, and don't let anything get in your way.

"You can achieve what you imagine, and so much more," she said.

"It's a big wide world, if you have a dream, go out there and chase it."

Kyarna's story is a testament to what's possible when passion meets perseverance.

From a garage startup to a multi-branch business, she's proving that with the right mindset, even the biggest dreams are within reach.

Kyarna Nalder, the founder and managing director of KLN.



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# Stepping into a new chapter

More than 16 years after making the spontaneous decision to purchase the Cohuna shoe store, Karen Mitchell has passed the reins to two local sisters eager to grow and expand the business.

Kazz's Heels will soon reopen as Sole Sisters, after Sarah Reid and Melissa Anderson complete their renovations.

"My goal when I sold it was to try and keep the doors open, keep the history in town and keep the small business going," Karen said.

"It's a huge win for our town and great to see a couple of local Cohuna girls take it on."

When Karen first took over the business, she was one of three farming women to take over retail businesses within the town in quick succession - her own venture joining a hairdresser and boutique dress shop.



Karen Mitchell hands the keys over to sisters Sarah Reid and Melissa Anderson after almost 17 years.

"The shoe shop has stood for 113 years, since 1913, and when I bought it, it was about to close down.

"We couldn't have a small town without a shoe shop, and I love shoes, and from that thought it all happened very quickly.

"I did think 'what have I done' soon after, but it's been the best thing.

"A lot of the Cohuna shops are owned and run by women, we have all stepped into them to keep the local trade open."

The store has catered to the clientele who still want to see, feel and try their purchases, keeping the town's shopping culture and business district going.

New co-owner Melissa said the renovations had resulted in a more open layout, allowing for additional space to expand the product range.

"It's actually beautiful to think this store has been going so long, and it's quite humbling to be part of that journey, to become part of the history of my small town," she said.

"We're going to keep the same product lines and add a bit more, build up more women's clothing, add more variety, while obviously still keeping a lot of shoes," she said.

"We want to cater for all different age groups as well, and stock more top of the range and reasonably priced stock.

"Times are tough, so we're just trying to add that balance for everybody.

Providing good old-fashioned customer service is something the duo is genuinely excited about, and it's been high on their priority list from the start.

"Sarah and I genuinely care for people and we want everyone to

## Kazz's Heels/ Sole Sisters

feel beautiful and walk out feeling empowered."

While Melissa is still readjusting to Victorian weather after enjoying tropical Queensland and South East Asia for the past 20 years, she has loved coming home.

"It's like being back in real life in the country, and it's nice to come back to ground roots," she said.

As Karen settles into retirement, she'll remain a familiar face around town, continuing as secretary for the Cohuna Progress Association, while enjoying the occasional round of golf.

Meanwhile, Melissa and Sarah are gearing up for their grand opening and plan to reveal the date through the Sole Sisters Facebook page.



## Kazz would like to thank everyone for their support - after 16 1/2 years she has sold

*Kazz wishes Melissa and Sarah all the best with their venture!*

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# Taking a dive pays off



**WHEN most people think of taking on a new business, they don't usually have a one-month-old baby at home and a global pandemic around the corner.**

Yet that's exactly how life unfolded for Casey Carpinteri, the owner of Swan Hill Pool and Spa and Swan Hill Garage Doors.

"It was definitely a risk," she said. "We were brand new parents and brand new business owners — then Covid happened a few months later.

"But we've never looked back." The plunge into business began in October 2019, when she and her husband bought Swan Hill Pool and Spa.

Her husband had already been

Casey Carpinteri has a knack for turning challenges into opportunities.

working there for eight years, and when the chance came to take over, they decided it was worth a shot.

Just a few months later, as lockdowns loomed, they launched a second business — Swan Hill Garage Doors.

The idea had been simmering for years.

Back when they renovated their home, they realised there wasn't a local garage door business.

Fast forward to 2020, with uncertainty about whether people would still be buying pools, they decided to create a safety net that quickly became a success in its own right.

Running two businesses while raising a family isn't for the faint-hearted, but she's discovered it suits her perfectly.

"I didn't expect to love working for myself as much as I do," Casey said.

"Yes, there are stressful mo-

ments, but I've met some beautiful customers and helped create some really stunning pools."

Her role stretches far beyond answering calls and emails.

She handles accounts, quoting, social media, and the daily juggling act that comes with small business ownership.

However, it's the little wins that mean the most.

"Completing each project feels like a big accomplishment, knowing you've brought happiness and excitement to customers who put their trust in you," she said.

Along the way, Swan Hill Pool and Spa has picked up multiple awards from Compass Pools, Master Pool Builders Victoria and SPASA Australia — achievements she describes as "amazing for our little business".

Yet, it hasn't all been smooth sailing.

## Casey Carpinteri

Getting the garage door side of things established took longer than expected.

"Starting a business is harder than taking over an established one," she explained.

"It really took three years before we noticed it taking off."

Still, her advice to other women considering starting a business is simple: "Definitely give it a go. It's fun, exciting, challenging, and you learn so much."

With strong support from family and friends, and a knack for turning challenges into opportunities, she's proved that sometimes the riskiest leaps — even with a newborn in tow — can pay off in the most rewarding ways.



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# Owning her business dream

**BORN and raised in Kerang, Georgia Lipp's journey from cleaner to business owner is a testament to resilience, community support, and finding the perfect work-life balance.**

At 32, Georgia owns and runs Gorg Lifestyle in Swan Hill, a thriving lottery retail and giftware shop.

"I'm so proud of myself," she said.

"I never imagined I'd own my own business, one that's so flexible and perfect for my life now and in the future."

Georgia said her path to business ownership began unexpectedly.

"It was a funny way I got involved," she said.

"I was cleaning houses for a few clients when one offered me a job at the Tattslooto shop in the Woolworths arcade.

"I haven't looked back since."

Georgia said after two years working in the shop, the previous owners offered her the chance to take over.

"They wanted to move on and gave me

the opportunity," she said.

"I'm so grateful I took it."

Now, three years into running her own business, Georgia gave thanks for the strong support system around her.

"I have three wonderful employees, and thanks to them, I can balance work and caring for my little boy," she said.

"My family and friends have also been a constant source of encouragement.

"I'm lucky to have such a great team and support network."

Georgia's background in customer service and retail laid the foundation for her success.

"All my experiences have shaped who I am today," she said.

"Owning a business has taught me so much, especially about professionalism and the behind-the-scenes work that often goes unnoticed."

Georgia encouraged other women to pursue their business dreams.

"Just do it, you'll figure it out along the way," said said.

"I wish I'd started sooner.

"It's been an amazing experience, and I hope to continue growing as a business owner."

Despite the challenges posed by online shopping, Georgia remained optimistic and said she values the loyalty of her local customers.

"I hope people enjoy their experience in my shop and keep coming back instead of shopping online," she said.

"I'm truly grateful for the support of my wonderful customers."

Georgia's story is a powerful reminder of the importance of community, resilience, and following your heart.

Georgia Lipp never imagined she would own her own business.





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Jan Thomas is committed to curating quality jewellery and gift items for her clientele.

**FOR more than a decade, Jan Thomas has been brightening Barham with her unique jewellery and gift shop, Jewellery on the Move.**

Situated in Mellool Street, the business has become a local favourite and a drawcard for visitors from across the region, including the

## Shining bright on the border

twin town of Koondrook and nearby Echuca and Swan Hill.

This year marks 12 years since Jan opened her doors as a sole trader, bringing with her a lifelong passion for jewellery.

"My love of jewellery began as a child with a treasured gift," she said.

"Over the years, I worked in the industry on commission, and eventually, I decided to take the leap and start my own business in my local town."

As the shop's director, Jan wears many hats.

She is committed to providing excellent customer service, offering a unique shopping experience, and curating quality jewellery and gift items for her clientele.

"When you have been involved for this long, you meet so many people,

especially visitors to the town," Jan said.

"They love coming to Barham and visiting my shop, and I enjoy seeing them return again and again.

Jan credits her entrepreneurial spirit to her family roots.

Her ancestors were general merchants in Kerang in the late 1800s, and she jokes that her sons think she could "sell ice to the Eskimos".

Despite the challenges of running a small business in a regional town, including the impact of COVID-19, her loyal customers continued to support her, often through social media channels.

Reflecting on her journey, Jan said the experience had taught her patience, tolerance, and understanding.

"I didn't expect to be here as long

as I have, so I must be doing something right," she said.

Among her proudest achievements was selling her first one-carat engagement ring — a milestone she remembers fondly.

Running a business in Barham has its challenges, particularly raising awareness among locals.

Jan also takes calculated risks, such as investing in high-value stock, which can take time to pay off.

Her advice to aspiring entrepreneurs, especially women, is simple: "Find something that you love and then do that. It won't feel like a job."

With her business now for sale as her family grows, Jan's legacy in Barham is secure.

Her shop remains a vibrant hub for jewellery lovers and visitors alike.

Jan Thomas



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 Shop 2 Mellool House | 13 Mellool Street, Barham 







Lisa Frankling has owned and operated Murray Blu Clothing and Things, ensuring Barham's retail scene remains local.

# Keeping Barham retail local

**Lisa Frankling**

**WHEN Lisa Frankling heard that Barham Discount was at risk of closing, she knew the town would lose more than just a store.**

"Alan and Marg (Barham Discounts) wanted to sell the business to retire, and made it known that if it hadn't sold, they would just close the doors," Lisa said.

"I thought that would be a big loss to the community, and at the time I was looking for a new challenge.

"This ticked all the boxes."

For the past 11 years, Lisa has owned and operated Murray Blu Clothing and Things, ensuring Barham's retail scene remains local.

But for Lisa, it is a story of coming home.

"I was born and raised in Barham," she said.

"I worked in Kerang at Hawthorne Bros when I was 15, at Safeway when it first opened, and then at the Kerang newsagency.

"Later, I worked on Great Keppel Island with

Connection 18-35 Tours, that was great fun. "I lived in Sydney for nine years, managed at Katies for six of them, got married, and had two beautiful girls.

"Coming back to Barham was a choice of lifestyle with two small children and a strong community atmosphere after living in Sydney.

"I decided the country was the best place to raise my family, so I came back to Barham at 35."

Running a small retail business has had its hurdles.

"Covid was a challenge, but I was able to trade with door service and home deliveries," she said.

"The biggest threat now is online retail.

"It takes money out of town, making it harder for small businesses to employ locals or support clubs, sponsorships and community events."

For Lisa, success comes from connection.

"Listening to customers' needs and applying them day-to-day is key," she said.

"Community and tourism support keep a town and its businesses flourishing."

Barham, she said, offers everything.

"You can wind down by the river, camp, fish, socialise, have a barbecue, and enjoy great food, drinks, dancing and laughter," Lisa said.

"With so many sports and activities, who wouldn't want to live here?"

Her advice to women in business is simple. "Make it something you truly love," Lisa said.

"Learn as much as you can, ask questions, and listen.

"You'll be surprised by the ideas that come your way."

And this year, Lisa's greatest joy is personal.

"Becoming a granny to my beautiful grandson, Carter, who's now almost four months old."

**Spring & Summer Stock Arriving Daily**

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**Murray Blu Clothing & Things**

26 Mellool Street, Barham. Phone: 5453 2868



# The jewel of Swan Hill

**FOR two decades, Rosie Ficarra has been the matriarch behind the region's longest-established and most trusted name in fine jewellery.**

As the owner and director of Kennedy's Showcase Jewellers, Rosie has shaped the business with her hands-on approach, dedication to customer service, and a deep love for the craft of fine jewellery.

"I wasn't expecting to be still loving what I do 20 years on," Rosie said.

"Still wanting to be here providing the same customer service and hopefully for many years yet."

Rosie spent 13 years in real estate before the businesswoman decided to purchase the store from a friend to become her own boss.

"It's incredibly rewarding to sell fine jewellery, especially engagement rings to couples and the joy we see it brings," she said.

Being in the luxury goods industry, Rosie said sometimes it pays to be



Rosie Ficarra is the matriarch of fine jewellery in Swan Hill.

bold.

The businesswoman has travelled

the globe extensively to bring some of the world's best jewellery to Swan Hill.

"I bought diamonds from Antwerp on my first trip in hoping that they all sold — they did, so it paid off," she said.

"I have been to the Vegas & Vincenza fairs sourcing new jewellery for our customers and most recently to a south sea pearl farm in Indonesia."

The store's commitment to excellence in all aspects of business saw Kennedy's Showcase Jewellers recognised as Showcase Member of the Year four times, and nominated a further five times.

"We have a large selection of diamond jewellery in store with something to suit all budgets," Rosie said.

"We specialise in both types of diamonds starting with natural diamonds, which are sourced from the ground and are the most expensive because of the time that they take to evolve.

"We also have a range of lab-grown and these are the more afford-

**Rosie Ficarra**

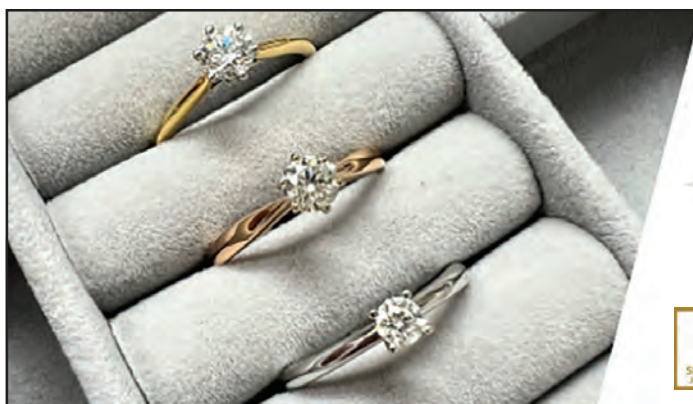
able diamonds as the laboratory is a more efficient process for production with the same properties. "

As part of the prestigious Showcase buying group, Kennedy's customers enjoy both local care and big-brand confidence.

Every piece of jewellery is crafted to the highest standard, and Showcase's exclusive guarantees ensure peace of mind with diamonds covered for seven years and a replacement guarantee to match.

"Being part of Showcase means all of our jewellery is of the finest quality, each and every time," Rosie said.

"Retail can be very challenging in these times and we appreciate our loyal customers returning regularly to keep our business where it is today."



*Timeless elegance*

View our engagement ring collection instore or online



**Kennedy's Showcase Jeweller**

195 Campbell Street, Swan Hill. P: 5032 1430





# Luxury transformation

Elli  
Carpenteri

PAPER, Scissors, Rock owner Elli Carpenteri attributes the success of her business to years of hard work and dedication.

She opened the salon in 2014, soon after returning from a year-long stint overseas, where she expanded her hairdressing knowledge.

"I always knew I would do hairdressing from the time I finished year 12, and when I did my first trial shift I felt like I always had been doing it," she said.

"In my time overseas I picked up new ideas, learned a lot around client experience and when I came home I could offer services that hadn't been done in Swan Hill before.

"When I was working in London, people really appreciated hairdressers and valued their skills, and I felt like I was offering something special to the clients.

"They had high standards and appreciated the time they spent with you."

As the salon has grown, Elli has had to put the scissors down and focus more on the business operations side.

"Stepping away from working on the floor was a risk, I didn't realise how reliant the business was on me being with clients, but it has paid off," she said.

**“** I get a lot of support from my husband, parents and staff now that I have a stable team and that makes it all possible.

"I like doing both hairdressing and running the business, especially seeing the brand and space that I have created with a vision come to life.

"I love seeing what the girls learn and watching them putting it into practice.

In the early days I didn't expect running a business to be so consuming, but it has to be, to some degree you have to put everything into it.

"I have learnt some boundaries now that I have to because I have three kids, I can't just be a slave to it.

"The salon has grown and changed and been in high demand, people love what we do which isn't luck, it takes a lot of hard work, but is worth it when it all comes together."

Maintaining the business while starting her family, was a key goal for Elli.

"I am proud that I was able to step

away from the salon to be with my kids and have the business remain successful," she said.

"I get a lot of support from my husband, parents and staff now that I have a stable team and that makes it all possible.

"I want to have the business forever, but it's important to be with the kids now.

"People did ask me if I would sell it when I got pregnant and I always said no, and I have achieved both goals which is all I wanted.

"We have since done a whole salon renovation, which meant we had to go into a temporary space and spent lots of money, all with three kids under six.

"I'm so glad we did that, it revitalised us all, and made the space something special for our clients."

Despite being in business for more than a decade, Elli is still learning and growing as she goes.

"Plenty of things challenge me from time to time, it's about learning from your mistakes," she said.

"Be prepared to work extremely hard and do the hard yards, take on every task - there's nothing you won't do as the owner."

Years of hard work and dedication has seen Elli Carpenteri succeed in her business.



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