

WARRAGUL WATER WARRIORS – History (by Colin Ramsay)

Five days after the new pool in Albert Street was opened to the public on 9th February 1957, a meeting was held at which Warragul Amateur Swimming Club was formed. The inaugural President was Geoff Foster, with membership fees set at ten shillings for seniors and five shillings for juniors. The pool was officially opened on 7th December 1957 by the Chief Commissioner of Police, Major-General S H Porter. A carnival was held in conjunction with the opening and featured demonstrations by members of Tom Donnet's training squad from Richmond and a special exhibition swim by Faith Leech (later an Olympic representative) from Bendigo. Competitors at the opening carnival were drawn from Warragul, Bairnsdale, Dandenong, Mirboo North, Sale, Traralgon and Yallourn.

The main pool is 55 yards long and 48 feet wide. A diving pool was constructed at a later date with one and three metre boards and a tower with five and ten metre platforms. The Country Championships were held at the pool in 1967 and 1971, but having only six lanes was not suitable for higher level competition meets after that date. However, the diving pool has been used a number of times - as recently as 1992 for Country Diving Championships. The Gippsland Championships have been held at the pool on five occasions - the first time in 1965, and the most recent time, in 1997, notwithstanding great resistance in the District to compete in a six lane pool.

For many years, moves were made to raise funds to construct clubrooms. These were opened during the Gippsland Championships in 1982 by Merv Norris who had been actively involved since 1968 in efforts to have clubrooms funded and built. On the final day "typical Warragul weather" ensued. The pool deck officials were soaked and most of the others sheltered in the clubrooms. One referee went home after swimming so wet, that a complete change of clothes was required before he could return to the pool to assist with packing up! Even the keys in his trousers went rusty!

A number of members have been made Life Members for long and outstanding service to the Club: Herb Hennessy, Albert Tatterson, Roy and Phyl Hutchinson, Marie Cumming, Ken Rowlinson, Bev Jostlear, Norm Mills, Neville Nielsen, Heather Reeves, Colin Ramsay, Nola Mills, Janet Ramsay, Doreen Custance and, most recently, Judi and Edwin Jewell.

Colin Ramsay served the longest term as President - six years (1985-1991), and served on the committee from 1969 until his death in 1996. Colin was responsible for drafting the majority of this history, and it is appropriate to print his efforts at this celebration.

In 1980, Elaine Collins heard that Warragul Lions' Club needed assistance with their catering activities at the annual Gippsland Field Days, so the Club became involved in selling hot dogs at the four day event. This provided a great source of income for the Club, with money coming from outside the area, and from those not involved in swimming. Many

thousands of dollars have been raised through this venture due to major support by Norm Mills, Nev Neilsen, Tom Searle, Colin Ramsay and Jenny Searle.

The Club ladies became involved in the early 80s with catering for Warragul Apex Club fortnightly dinner meetings. Many improvements to the clubrooms have been financed from this regular effort and, in recent years, with doubts about the long term existence of the clubrooms, funds have been used to subsidise bus trips to distant swim meets such as Bairnsdale and Sale. Main workers over the years have been Nola Mills, Heather Reeves and Judi Jewell.

In the early 80s, a pool was built at Neerim South, semi-heated, later by solar energy. Close links were established with the Neerim South Swimming Club (not affiliated with Swimming Victoria). Many of their members were encouraged to take their swimming further and more seriously, so they joined Warragul Club. Many fine swimmers came to the Club in this way. A few swimmers also joined from Drouin Club which disbanded. Many parents of swimming commenced actively swimming for the Club at this time in 17 years & over events. Prior to this, the Club had experienced a downturn in strength, but with the influx of new members, Warragul became a major force. This gain in strength produced confidence and subsequently propelled Warragul to become the most successful Club in the district since the Gippsland Championships were introduced in 1971. Warragul has been awarded this prestigious trophy nine times, with a record seven year hold on the title since 1991.

With the increase in strength, the need for a united front became apparent and a swimming club uniform was introduced for its first showing at the 1986 Country Championships at Geelong. There have been many updated versions, but all encompass a spirit which a uniform enhances. During 1991, Vin Rowe Pty Ltd became the Club's first major sponsor and this company's generosity enabled the introduction of the distinctive blue and yellow jacket proudly worn by the Club's representatives at all levels of competition across the nation.

In 1984, Drouin High School enclosed and heated its pool, enabling the Club to train regularly in winter. Before this, winter training was at Newborough, on a very occasional basis only. The Drouin High School Pool did experience some difficulties during wet and cold weather - not least that the air inside the pool became very foggy, with visibility reduced to only a few metres. It was impossible to see across or along the small pool. This posed something of a safety hazard.

During 1982, a small group of energetic enthusiasts began fundraising for the sole purpose of having an indoor pool built in Warragul and, due to their commitment, ten years later, in 1992, a new indoor pool was opened, on a site away from the outdoor pool. This is an eight lane, 25 metre pool, with separate hydrotherapy pool and learners' pool, built as part of the Warragul Leisure Centre. Sadly, despite many efforts from the community

the Warragul outdoor pool was closed in 2007 with the Baw Baw Shire announcing that it will not be replaced in the foreseeable future. The Club now uses three pools for training - Warragul Indoor and Drouin Secondary College and Drouin outdoor to cater for the spectrum of opportunities from Club to National level.

The Club has always provided many Gippsland District active officials, with members qualified in all positions and working assiduously at District, Country and State levels.

While not having as long a history as some, the Club's 50+ year history has seen many hard workers for swimming and diving, and considerable achievements to the stage where the Club members achieve excellent results at Country, State and Australian National level.

It is hoped others may add their memories to further document the activities of the Warragul Amateur Swimming Club over the years.