

History beneath the surface

A TOUR of the aboriginal sites of significance throughout Greater Dandenong and Casey revealed the past and what is buried below but also enlightened those present on what Aboriginal people want for tomorrow.

The council's Inter-Council Aboriginal Consultative (ICAC) organised a tour reserved for councillors and Aboriginal community members with the hope of spreading what they learnt throughout their community.

Aboriginal singer songwriter Kutcha Edwards hosted the tour and spoke about his vision for the future.

"It's not about an us and them mentality, it's about a collective mindset for a better tomorrow," Mr Edwards said.

The tour stopped at the Dandenong Police Paddocks, Hampton Park renewal project, Lynbrook Estate and the Dandenong Pultney Street Park.

The group of 22 looked at scar trees and listened to talks from Wurundjeri Land Council representative Jemima Gardiner, archaeologist Mandy Nicholson and Dandenong and District Aborigines Co-operative executive officer Andrew Gardiner.

Ms Nicholson said the Lynbrook Estate was previously a swamp.

"Before it was a farm it was a swamp, prolific in bird life with a lot of sand from Port Phillip bay, most of Cranbourne's sand is beneath us here in Lynbrook," she said.

Ms Nicholson was working for the Wurundjeri Land Council and dug the Lynbrook area 17 years ago.

"It's about recording the history of the area and the different people that lived here," she said.

Greater Dandenong Mayor



Angela Long and John Murray with the scar tree in Dandenong Pultney Park. 139040

Sean O'Reilly said the tour had given him a new perspective on aboriginal culture.

"I was born in 1971 and at school was taught a particular view of Aboriginal history that was largely about having pity upon the Aboriginal people, about what white man had done when they colonised Australia," Cr O'Reilly said.

"This experience has helped me to understand that the aboriginal people still don't feel that they have been given the due respect as Australia's first people," he said.

ICAC member and Casey Local Area Commander Inspector Paul Breen spoke to the group outlining why it was so impor-

tant for him to attend.

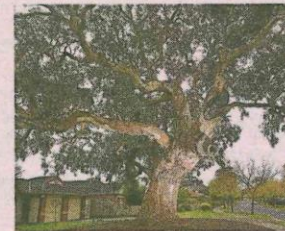
"As a local commander I have to get my head around these complex issues because we often see drunken, homeless and drug affected Aboriginals and for me to be a better leader I need to be a part of these meetings," Insp Breen said.

The tour was held in the lead up to Reconciliation Week and provided participants with a greater knowledge of what Dandenong and Casey was once like and the exact locations of Aboriginal significance in their community.

During the lunch break Mr Edwards held up his mobile phone and said "culture is about Aboriginal people holding this



Archaeologist Mandy Nicholson explained what could be found beneath the homes in Lynbrook Estate.



The Lynbrook Estate has catered for its significant trees and made sure construction was developed around the old pieces of history. 139040

phone and talking to our mobs on it."

"We are an adapting people and we will always adapt to the environment we live or have been placed," Mr Edwards said.

- GEORGIA WESTGARTH

Refugees are building bridges for employment

A RUSH of asylum seekers who are desperate to exercise newly-acquired work rights has descended on the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre's Dandenong office.

Manager Rosa Misitano said the office – funded through philanthropy – faces the challenge of getting 25 new weekly clients job-ready.

She said there had been a recent surge of asylum seekers transferred from bridging visas to temporary protection visas - which has allowed them to work in Australia for the first time.

The ASRC's case workers help clients to create resumes, and learn the art of interviews, follow-up calls, and occupational health and safety.

For many clients, they also must first attend classes for six months to improve their English-language skills.

"They say 'I've been here two years' but we can't put them forth to an employer if they need a translator," Ms Misitano said.

"You need your basics for (occupational) health and safety.

"Employers want people who can follow instructions."

It's hard to pull the reins on clients "excited and desperate" for work.

In many cases, their lives have been in impoverished and unemployed limbo for months and years.

In the past year, the resource centre has helped 37 clients gain their "first job in Australia".

"Some employers are wonderful," Ms Misitano said. "They're really interested in having someone loyal and willing to work hard.

"We get people quite qualified who are willing to take farm and factory work. They don't leave after three weeks."

Volunteers from various workplaces have recently pitched in to help fast-track clients' job-ready induction.

Recently five staff from global IT company Workday helped out with resume writing and job skills workshops.

The ASRC is seeking volunteers who are experienced in Australian workplace culture as well as qualified English as a Second Language tutors.

Details from dandenong@asrc.org.au.

- CAM LUCADOU-WELLS