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EQUIPMENT LAUNCH



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Pyramid Hill Progress Association president Nev Miller said the community felt robbed over the loss of their town's aged care facility. **Picture: JENNY DENTON**



TOWN TRAGEDY

Working group established following aged care closure

JENNY DENTON

THE Pyramid Hill community will form a working group to collaborate with the Loddon Shire Council on options for the use of the town's aged care facility, which is set to permanently close by the end of November.

Around 80 people packed the lounge of the Victoria Hotel in Pyramid Hill on Wednesday night, in what Pyramid Hill Progress Association president Nev Miller described as an emotional and at times heated meeting.

Respect Aged Care managing director Jason Binder attended the meeting and told those present that the home had been losing money since it was taken over by commercial operators Alcheringa in the early 1990s.

Mr Binder told the *Loddon Times* Alcheringa had invested more than \$1 million into the home, which contributed to the company's demise.

Alcheringa was taken over by Respect Aged Care in 2010.

"Between Alcheringa and Respect, more than \$2 million has been donated to the home for the benefit of the Pyramid Hill community," Mr Binder said.

"This has been a huge contribution to not only the building, but the history of the site, and the economic activity in the town for the last 10 years."

However, Mr Miller said Mr Binder seemed to lack recognition of the role the community had played in establishing and running the facility and its sense of ownership of it.

When it opened in July 1993 the Pyramid Hill Hostel for the Aged,

as it was then named, was "a tribute to the community's persistence," according to a book on district medical services by local historian Helen Stevens.

Entitled *Bandages Bedpans Pills and Stethoscopes*, the book notes "it ended an eight-year battle for funding to improve health and welfare services for the aged."

Of the money raised to build the facility, \$318,000 came from local contributions, with another \$335,000 received as a government grant.

Former hostel committee president Allan Mann described the imminent closure as "a tragedy for the town".

"It's an excellent, modern facility and it has 30 people on the payroll," Mr Mann said.

He said under community man-

agement the hostel had survived quite well, thanks in part to extensive community volunteering and fundraising.

The decision to hand it over to Alcheringa was made because aged care management was becoming increasingly complex and the committee saw benefits in the facility being part of a larger group.

"The committee saw the advantage of keeping it viable in changing times by going with a group that had other facilities as well. They believed there could've been opportunities from a management point of view, and in getting residents too," Mr Mann said.

Meanwhile, Mr Miller said the Pyramid Hill community felt "robbed" and disappointed by the imminent closure.

He said while the Pyramid Hill

community was resigned to the loss of their aged care facility in the town, they were now focused on trying to get a positive outcome on the building.

"We're going to set up a working group to work with the shire to look at options to make good use of the facility that's there," he said.

However, Mr Binder said Respect Aged Care would consider the fate of the building once all residents had been relocated from it.

"We're hoping the building can be used for another purpose that will bring economic activity to the town," Mr Binder said.

"We're open to any suggestions and hopefully there's a viable purpose for the building in its transition from a bush hospital, to an aged care home, to the next phase in its history," he said.

Weather

TODAY Sunny, 2-16



TOMORROW Cloudy, 3-18



THURSDAY Partly cloudy, 4-21



FRIDAY Partly cloudy, 5-23



SATURDAY Partly cloudy, 5-21

