



Constituents listened intently at the candidates' forum. Picture — KEN JENKINS

Mallee candidates had their moments

JENNY DENTON

FORTUNATELY three of the Mallee candidates were unable to make it to the pre-election forum in Swan Hill on Monday night.

Accommodating a panel of 10 was challenge enough, with each aspirant given only five minutes to make their case.

The forum was jointly hosted by the *Gannawarra Times* and *The Guardian*.

The seat, which is Victoria's largest, has attracted more contenders in this year's Federal election than any other around the country.

The next-busiest in terms of candidates are Tony Abbott's New South Wales seat of Warringah, and Attorney-General Christian Porter's electorate of Pearce in Western Australia, which both have 10.

With the Swan Hill forum following similar events in Nhill, Horsham, Maryborough and Mildura, most of the Mallee panellists were familiar with each other's pitches.

"We're not particularly entertaining as a group," Liberal Serge Petrovich apologised,

in his opening contribution.

While that may have been true, the night had its moments.

The audience heard about Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party hopeful Dan Straub's hat (one of a collection of five), independent Jason Modica's grandfather's suitcase (all he arrived with from Italy in 1922) and Labor member Carol Hart's old red ute (so close to breakdown she had to hire a car to finish campaigning), as well as her worries about inadvertently acquiring citizenship via marriage.

Despite the broad political spectrum represented, there was a civility, even camaraderie, between the candidates.

Notwithstanding variation in the quality of candidacy and insufficient time to pursue any issues in depth, the concern of the panellists for the region, their preparedness to throw their hat in the ring, front up and maintain their humour, and the full house in the Town Hall meeting room gave the event a real sense of grassroots democracy in action.

PAGES 6-7 — What they said...

Function centre parking angst

JENNY DENTON

A PLANNING application for the development of a function centre with accommodation at the former St Paul's Anglican Church site in Koondrook has been approved by the council despite objections about parking by Murray ward representative, Cr Steve Tasker.

The development, at 90 Main Street, Koondrook, will see the exterior of the church retained, with the interior developed into accommodation, a marquee erected to serve as the function centre, and new buildings constructed to house a bar, outdoor kitchen and storage shed.

The function centre will be licenced to operate between 11am and 11pm and to accommodate up to 120 people.

Cr Tasker said he supported the development, which was "a great thing for the community, not just Koondrook but the shire", but was voting against the application on the grounds that the car parking provided would be inadequate.

A reduction of the standard number of park-

ing spaces required for a "place of assembly" under Gannawarra Planning Scheme - from 36 to 4 - formed part of the permit.

"Although only four car parks are proposed to be provided on site, it is considered that there is sufficient on street parking available within close proximity to the subject site," council documents state.

Cr Tasker said he had received feedback from community members that the parking arrangements were inadequate, and argued that unused land at the rear of the 2031 square metre site could be used to create extra spaces.

He voted against the motion to approve the application.

Speaking after the council meeting, Gannawarra Shire director of infrastructure and development Geoff Rollinson said the council considered that parking at the venue wouldn't be an issue.

"We believe the need will be accommodated, given the times of operation," he said. Only one formal objection to the application was received by the council, which related primarily to noise.

Compliance blitz in state forests

PEOPLE enjoying parks, reserves and forests along the Murray River this weekend are likely to see authorised officers out in full force to ensure visitors and locals follow the forest regulations and have a safe weekend.

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning senior forest and wildlife officer, Glenn Smith, said patrols will focus on Gunbower, Guttrum and Benwell state forests.

"This is a multi-agency operation to ensure visitors obey the laws for domestic firewood collection, littering, trail bike riding, campfire safety and duck hunting," Mr Smith said.

The patrols will involve officers from DELWP, Game Management Authority, Victorian Fisheries Authority and Victoria Police.

Firewood collection in Gunbower has been restricted to residents of the Gannawarra, Swan Hill, Loddon and Campaspe municipalities for the past four years and continues this year at the designated Guttrum State Forest domestic firewood collection area.

Mr Smith said that people are reminded that they can drive or ride on any of the formed roads open to the public in forests, parks and reserves, but driving off-road is illegal as it impacts the environment.

APPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNITY/SPORTING GRANTS

- Applications open Monday, June 3 and close COB Friday, June 21
- Not for profit groups/clubs
- Eligible applicants must be locally based and show direct benefit to Kerang & district residents
- Applications forms can be picked up from management at Kerang Sporties



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