

A very Warnie holiday

We love our beach

WARRNAMBOOL
By **MATT NEAL**

IT'S something of a local in-joke, but the official figures back it up — Warrnamboolians love camping in Warrnambool.

The uniquely Warrnambool phenomenon continues unabated this year, with locals making up 13 per cent of bookings at Warrnambool Surfside Holiday Park and Shipwreck Bay Holiday Park (aka Surfside 1 and Surfside 2 respectively) in the Boxing Day-January 31 period.

That figure is even higher for Surfside 2 alone, where almost a quarter of all bookings are city residents.

"It is a uniquely Warrnamboolian thing," Warrnambool's tourism services manager Peter Abbott said.

"I do have to describe it to some people. I haven't come across it anywhere else.

"But this is the first time we've done this report and there's a perception that there would be a higher percentage (of Warrnamboolians staying at Surfside).

"It's still a considerable number though."

Mr Abbott noted that for many local families, staying at Surfside 1 or 2 was simply a matter of tradition.

"It is the best time of year to be in Warrnambool," he said.

The council survey also showed that Melbourne is the most popular home-base for visitors to the two Warrnambool City Council-run caravan parks, making up 20 per cent of all bookings.

Warrnambool and Ballarat are equal second with 13 per cent. They are followed by Colac (nine per cent) and Geelong (six per cent).

Interstate visitors make up nine per cent of bookings, with most of those coming from South Australia and NSW/ACT.

Surfside 1 and 2's 1150 sites are not fully booked at the moment, which is a common occurrence in the first weeks of January, Mr Abbott said.

"We have about 30-40 sites available at the moment," he said.

"We're accommodating between 4500-5000 people every night and they're staying for an average of nine-and-a-half days."

mneal@fairfaxmedia.com.au



Warrnambool's new Merri Marine Sanctuary summer ranger Danni Rizzo inspects her domain.

Just coasting along keeps Danni busy

WARRNAMBOOL
By **MATTHEW O'TOOLE**

THE Warrnambool Merri Marine Sanctuary will be a little safer and more fun this holiday season with the arrival of summer ranger Danni Rizzo.

Miss Rizzo, 28, originally from Moorabbin in Melbourne, recently graduated from Deakin University with a degree in marine biology and has been busy with summer

programs at the sanctuary. "It's been really busy so far but incredibly fulfilling," Miss Rizzo said.

"Most people don't even know that it exists, so it's great to be the one to let them know it exists."

As part of her job she is tasked with educating visitors to the 25-hectare marine sanctuary while ensuring the rocky, tidal area and its creatures are properly cared for.

"It's great to encourage

people to explore the area while also protecting it at the same time," she said.

As part of the "Summer by the Sea" program run by the Department of Sustainability and Environment and Parks Victoria, Miss Rizzo and other rangers are running cliff-top walks, "rock pool rambles" and snorkelling activities in Stingray Bay.

The rock pool rambles have been especially rewarding for Miss Rizzo,

who said "everyone loves a rock pool".

"It's amazing how little kids are like sponges, they just soak all the info up."

During the summer months, Parks Victoria employs summer rangers to run visitor programs when regular rangers are often busy with bushfire fighting.

More information about the Summer by the Sea program can be found on the Parks Victoria website.

Look out — the Pickford-Wright gang is taking over

WARRNAMBOOL
By **MATTHEW O'TOOLE**

A FAMILY from Stawell cannot get enough of Warrnambool after clocking up their 37th year on the same site at the Shipwreck Bay Holiday Park.

Verna Pickford, 84, referred to jokingly as the park's

matriarch by her family and friends, has been coming to the area since the late 1940s. She spent time at other camping grounds before reserving the same site at Surfside 2, now known as Shipwreck Bay, for the past 37 years.

"There was none of this here at all," explained Mrs Pickford.

"We just camped in the dunes ... and had a couple of piles of hessian bags as our toilet facilities while we camped in tents."

Over the years the group staying at the site has expanded to four generations, with Verna's three daughters — Deb Slorach, 52, Faye Connell, 63, and Trish Ralph,

54 — bringing along their growing families.

However, the tribe includes more than just blood relatives now. It extends to the many friends that they have made, including Dorothy Wright, 76, from Bendigo, who has been on the adjacent site for the past 45 years.

Mrs Wright has her own four

generations who come each year as well, strengthening the ties between the families. They have attended each others' birthdays and weddings throughout the years.

"We're slowly but surely taking over the joint," joked Mrs Slorach, who explained that as a group they occupied 14 sites and stayed from two

to three weeks each. "It's like a family reunion (with our holiday adoptees," Mrs Pickford said.

And the tradition shows no sign of ending soon. They have already lodged their forms to reserve the same sites for next summer — plus a request for some more for the growing "family".

Driver nods off at wheel

WARRNAMBOOL
By **CLARE QUIRK**

A WARRNAMBOOL driver who fell asleep at the wheel and crashed into signs and a traffic pole has been fined \$800.

Jarryd Stuart Irving, 22, of Merrivale Drive, pleaded guilty in Warrnambool Magistrates Court on Tuesday to careless driving.

On October 21 last year Irving and a friend were approaching the intersection of Melbourne Road and Bell Parade near Geelong North when Irving's ute veered to the right and mounted the centre median strip, colliding with a number of signs and a traffic pole before stopping.

Police prosecutor, Leading Senior Constable Kevin Mullins, said the last thing Irving remembered was an underpass about 400 metres before he passed out.

He said in May, 2010, Irving had been

convicted of dangerous driving.

Irving's defence counsel said his client had been driving trucks with a new employer when the crash occurred.

He said on that day Irving had driven a car from Warrnambool to Koroit to pick up milk samples to take to Melbourne.

He said Irving took a friend with him for company and they had arrived in Melbourne at 10pm.

He said the friend had a drink in Melbourne and Irving intended to pull over for a sleep when he got to Geelong.

Via video link from Geelong Magistrates Court, Magistrate Ann McGarvie said that as a truck driver Irving should have known more than anyone else the importance of stopping when tired.

She said it was lucky the passenger had not been injured or killed.

Irving was convicted and fined \$800.

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