

Secondary entry #2: Merriwa Central School



MERRIWA MOUTHPIECE



SERVICE: Merriwa's volunteers.
Picture: Jodie Mulholland

Heroes won't back down from helping

By TIEHSA KEOGH,
MIRANDA BOLAND and
JODIE MULHOLLAND

THEY search for the lost, free the trapped and help the injured. For the past 35 years, Merriwa has been watched over by a brave group of locals who repeatedly put their lives in harm's way to save others.

The Volunteer Rescue Association (VRA) started in 1978 and currently consists of 14 members, though not all of them are active.

These members of the VRA are all local residents who tirelessly answer the call to arms at all hours, putting aside their personal lives for the sake of others. It is not just the time that they commit at the grisly scene of accidents that makes a difference to the community, though.

Hours of specialist training is required in order to ensure that the volunteers are well prepared for local emergencies.

The Merriwa VRA works in conjunction with police and ambulance officers regularly to maintain their skills. All VRA members require a minimum of 24 hours training every six months in order to retain their rescue board number.

There's no way of preparing for their first accident though; the volunteers must test themselves to see if they can handle the rigours of being a member of the VRA.

Being a VRA member isn't about being a hero, it's about helping people in need.

By ANASTASIA MARTIN and
DEMME HILTON

THE departure of local doctors has caused distress throughout the community of Merriwa. The town recently went without a doctor for about four weeks.

Dr Bronwyn Stokes was relieved from the Merriwa hospital one month ago to continue her trade at Port Macquarie.

Merriwa's other doctor, Dr Ram-ses Salama, fell ill and was unable to continue his ongoing support of the local community.

These circumstances have affected Merriwa citizens in major ways, including the aged residents of Gumman Place.

Miss Suzanne Duggan, a caregiver at Gumman Place, explained the worries generated by the absence of doctors.

"The residents are distraught that they have no backup doctor for ongoing treatments," she said.

Elderly residents at the nursing home have had to travel to Muswellbrook for treatments and general checkups. This has been very difficult for elderly patients as travelling long distances can be tiring and upsetting.

"I am worried about the public in emergency situations, having no doctor is a real problem," local pharmacist Robert Smith said.

It would appear that he is not



ABANDONED: The Merriwa multipurpose service centre needs a permanent physician.

alone in his concerns. Large numbers of emergencies occur every day and without a doctor, people of the area are anxious for their own safety and well-being.

Merriwa is not the only rural area struggling with the absence of doctors. Many communities around the Upper Hunter are apprehensive about having no doctor to respond to emergencies.

Maintaining doctors in rural areas has proved to be complicated. Remote areas are more difficult for some medical practitioners to acclimatise to as they are not familiar with the intricacies of a country lifestyle.

After four agonising weeks without a doctor, Merriwa received a short-term replacement, Dr Michael Hodges, who is only slated

to service the medical needs of locals for one short month while relieving for Dr Salama. Due to his illness it is dubious whether Dr Salama will be returning to Merriwa's hospital and surgery.

While the efforts of Dr Stokes and Dr Salama will be hard to follow, Merriwa is now in search of a long-term doctor who will care for our community.



DISAPPOINTED: Merriwa junior rugby league players, from left, Luke Cronin, Jake Barry-Diehm and Cody Towell.

Picture: Matthew Wightman

Game over for young footy team

By JOHN CRONIN AND
MATTHEW WIGHTMAN

THIS year the Merriwa Junior Rugby League Association lost a significant number from their under 15s team, leaving them with no choice but to fold.

Many young players were excited for the season to start, only to have their dreams taken away.

Former president Max

McNaught was saddened to hear that there would not be a team: "The boys were a strong team last season and it's disappointing to see that they won't get the chance to play this year."

The collapse means the players have the choice to either sit out the season or travel to the surrounding suburbs of Scone or Denman to take part in the competition – a distance of at least

60 kilometres one way.

Paul Medd, current president of the Merriwa Junior Rugby League Association, said it is disappointing to see the team not playing this year as they were a great group, on and off the field.

Rugby league is not the only code in Merriwa to have taken a blow due to lack of numbers; the Bumblebees rugby union side was also forced to fold in recent years.

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