

Primary entry #19: Singleton Heights Public School



Singleton



VITAL: Jim Vikas is an asset to our country. Picture: Deanna Mayled

The value of Australia's immigrants

By **DEANNA MAYLED**
and **KAITLIN SMITH**

COMING to a new country is not easy, but there are many benefits for both the refugee and the country receiving them.

Jim Vikas made his way to Australia at the age of five. His parents were German and had survived the occupation of Greece. After the war, Jim remembers, "it was chaotic".

"My parents had the opportunity to come to a better place and they grabbed it."

Arriving in Australia, he said the "hardest thing was not being able to communicate". The customs and food were very different and they couldn't buy the food they were used to. He also has strong childhood memories of racism, "it appeared like they didn't want us here".

His father worked along the food belt, so he lived in places from Townsville to Melbourne, before they settled in Port Kembla. Despite the difficulties, Jim became an electrician. He then went to night school and became a teacher, working at Singleton High School for 25 years before retiring.

Like many immigrants, Jim has given back to the community through his professional and private life. He has been a member of the APEX and Lions Clubs and volunteers for the local bush fire brigade.

Jim had no hesitation in saying that "Australia is [his] home country," despite his connection to Greece.

By **ARTHUR BOWMAN**
and **BEN HORRIDGE**

MULTICULTURAL communities often feature in urban areas but a recent survey of an Upper Hunter school showed that cultural diversity is also present in rural areas.

The survey was conducted as part of Harmony Week celebrations at Singleton Heights Public School earlier this year and parents were asked to identify their family's cultural heritage - with surprising results.

Although it was known that 12 per cent of the student population identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, the range of ethnic backgrounds was thought to be unusual for a country town. More than 60 cultural backgrounds were identified from all of the continents and the Pacific region.

Students with backgrounds from Madagascar, Tanzania, Nigeria, Rwanda and Namibia mix happily with South American students from Paraguayan and Brazilian heritage. Many European countries were also represented.

One of the largest migrant reception and training centres was based at Greta between 1949 and 1960.

Set up by the Department of Immigration, the camp had previously been an army training base. More than 100,000 new migrants

passed through this camp during these years as part of the post-war immigration to Australia.

This camp was based only 30 minutes from Singleton, so many of the families settled in the area. Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia,

Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, East Timor, Japan, Papua New Guinea, Thailand, Nepal, India and Myanmar were more unexpected.

Such a diverse range of Asian backgrounds had not been well-known by the school population. According to the report Australia's Migration 2011-2012, released by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, India, for the first time, was the major source of new permanent migrants to Australia, followed by China.

Of the total combined migration and humanitarian programs, only 7379 out of 198,757 were boat people - just 3.7 per cent. The Pacific region was represented by students with backgrounds from the Philippines, Fiji, Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Samoa and Tonga.

According to the last census, one in four Australians were born overseas.

Singleton Heights does not typify these results, but going back a generation or two, it reflects the immigration that has created the national community.



UNITY: Singleton Heights has a wide-reaching mix of cultural backgrounds, representing the seven continents. Picture: Arthur Bowman



PROGRESS: Traffic problems will hopefully be resolved in the near future. Picture: Brigid Fleming

End in sight to commuter delays

By **MADELYNNE WOOD**
and **ERIN STEPHENS**

COMMUTERS in the Upper Hunter will be breathing a sigh of relief at the end of the year when the construction of the Hunter Expressway is expected to be finished.

Traffic has been seriously affected with many long delays occurring around Singleton and Branxton.

Commuters often com-

plain about the current trip. "The congestion is horrible," said Pip Furner, who can't wait to see the end of the build-up.

"It turns my 20-minute trip into a 40-minute trip."

"The Branxton traffic lights are a particular problem," she said, as it seems are all sections which merge into one lane.

Instead of kilometres of two-lane road, interrupted

by road works and road closures, the upcoming expressway will deliver 27 kilometres of divided highway between Kurri Kurri and Branxton.

There will be 22 bridges and four separate interchanges with the F3 freeway.

More than 600 workers from Abigroup contractors have been involved. The cost of the expressway is expected to be \$1,651,000.



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