

AUTUMN 2025

Community Matters

# VICSES

SPECIAL EDITION



1975-2025





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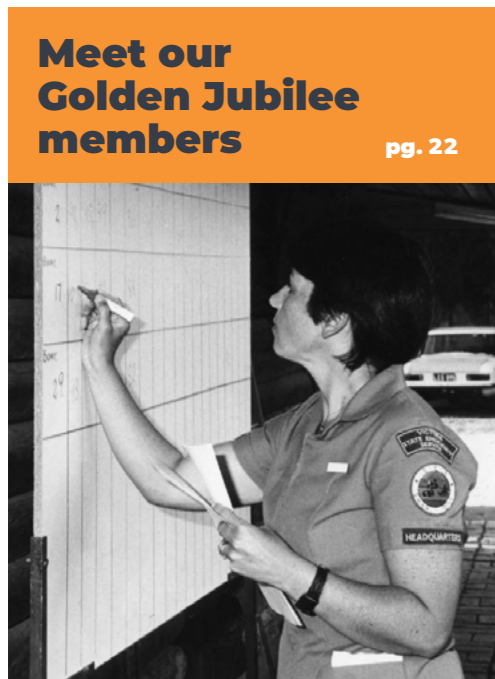
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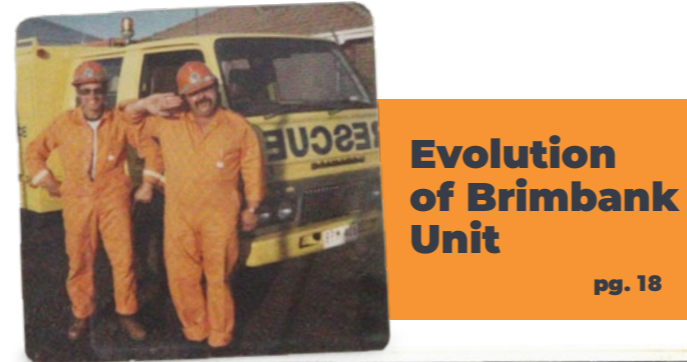
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### Message from the VICSES Interim Chief Executive Officer

It's a privilege to be the Interim CEO as we enter our 50th year as VICSES, with the service having evolved from the Civil Defence Organisation back in March 1975.

**T**his is a time for us to reflect on the incredible service we've provided to our communities over the decades, and to acknowledge the selfless and outstanding contributions of our volunteers and staff – both past and present – who have helped shape who we are today. As we celebrate this Golden Jubilee milestone, it's also a time for us to share, together with the Board and Management, our excitement and optimism for the opportunities ahead.

I trust that each of our members will take a moment to reflect on our 50-year journey as a service, along with the many changes you've experienced during your time with VICSES. Remarkably, 16 volunteers have served their communities continuously with VICSES for a whole 50 years. Our service is full of extraordinary people, but to those 16, we acknowledge your outstanding dedication and say a very big thank you and congratulations.

I'd also like to express my gratitude to the 50 Years of VICSES working group, in collaboration with the Community and Communications team, who have been planning the various initiatives to celebrate and recognise this significant milestone – including the state gala event on Saturday, 22 March.

Every current VICSES member will receive a commemorative lapel pin to mark the occasion, and each unit and office will be presented with a 50th anniversary plaque for display.

I hope you all enjoy this special Golden Jubilee edition of Community Matters, as we reflect on our history and evolution as a service and look ahead to a progressive and innovative future.

Kind regards,

**Kate White**  
VICSES Interim Chief Executive Office

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Minister for Emergency Services

Emergency Management Commissioner

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The Victoria State Emergency Service respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

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# MESSAGES FROM OUR LEADERS

## Message from the Minister for Emergency Services



I welcome you to this special edition of Community Matters as I take on my new role as Victoria's Minister for Emergency Services and Natural Disaster Recovery.

I'm grateful to be in a position to support these important portfolios that focus on supporting communities and keeping them safe. It is a privilege to see firsthand the dedication and hard work of our incredible first responders and volunteers. I look forward to working with you all, our VICSES members, this year.

Wednesday, 5 March marks 50 years of VICSES – giving us an opportunity to reflect on the rich history and evolution of the service since its establishment in 1975, and to thank volunteers and staff, past and present, for their contribution.

We are grateful for the vital role VICSES plays in our emergency management sector, leading the response for flood, storm, earthquake, landslide, and tsunami throughout Victoria. VICSES also provides the largest road crash rescue network in Australia.

This includes responding to some of the state's most challenging historic emergency events, as well as supporting partner agencies including Ambulance Victoria, Country Fire Authority, Fire Rescue Victoria, and Victoria Police. Time and time again, VICSES volunteers have stepped up to keep local communities safe from natural disasters – when we need you, we know you will be there.

We also know that it is families and communities that support volunteers

to be able to do this important work. This generosity means that more Victorians can be helped when they need it.

In recent years, we've seen increasing natural disasters and the lasting devastation they can bring, including floods and storms. With this increased demand, it's crucial to ensure VICSES units are equipped to meet the ongoing needs of local communities.

Understanding this, the Victorian Government is delivering \$250 million to support emergency and disaster recovery services – to help keep our communities safe, 365 days a year. The new Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund will further support emergency service agencies, including for the first time VICSES, and enable these agencies to have the resources and capabilities to keep Victorians safe and help them to recover from natural disasters - now, and into the future.

This investment is a meaningful recognition of the critical role that VICSES plays in this sector and the value your expertise and experience brings in disaster response.

As you reflect on experiences, relationships, memories and the history of VICSES during this special milestone, I know you will also deservedly celebrate the significant achievements and contributions over the past 50 years.

Thank you, stay safe, and all the best for the year ahead.

**Vicki Ward**  
Minister for Emergency Services  
Minister for Natural  
Disaster Recovery



## Message from the Emergency Management Commissioner

For 50 years, VICSES has played a vital part in Victoria's emergency management sector. Through floods, storms, rescues, fire support and more, VICSES volunteers have consistently stepped up to support their communities in times of need.

The work you do makes a real difference. From supporting search and rescue on the ground, in the water or from the air, to clearing debris off roads after a storm or sandbagging before a flood – your efforts help keep communities safer and more resilient.

This extends to your support for our partner agencies, including during significant events like Ash Wednesday, Black Saturday and the 2019-2020 Bushfires. I also can't forget the great work you've done in assisting Victoria Police at crime scenes and in search and rescue over this time.

Your willingness to roll up your sleeves and take on challenging tasks, both in Victoria and when deployed interstate, reflects the dedication and commitment of all VICSES members.

Responding to emergencies is never easy, yet your ability to provide practical

support, while also offering compassion to those affected, is deeply appreciated.

It's also important to acknowledge the mental health and wellbeing support you offer to others and remind you to take care of yourselves. The work you do is demanding, and looking after your own wellbeing is just as vital.

To all current and past VICSES volunteers and staff, thank you for your ongoing support, dedication and service. Thanks also to your families and support networks, whose understanding and encouragement make your contributions possible.

Your efforts are essential to keeping Victorian communities safe, and I look forward to continuing to support the important work you do.

Take care,

**Rick Nugent**  
Victoria Emergency  
Management  
Commissioner

## Message from the VICSES Chief Officer Operations

When I reflect on my time of more than 30 years with VICSES, initially as volunteer and then as a staff member, I've had the privilege of working alongside so many terrific members during key milestone moments and a number of major reforms that continue to influence our operations at VICSES today.

VICSES has only continued to flourish. Although there is still much to do it's important to take a step back and look at how far we've come, with new fit for purpose facilities across the state, as well as numerous local refurbishments and enhancements through the Volunteer Emergency Services Equipment Program over recent years.

We've seen continued growth in the support of our members – from myself being the only Volunteer Support Officer (VSO) in 2003 to now having 22 VSOs. Additionally, our health and wellbeing support programs have never been bigger and more robust.

There are more VICSES milestones than I can fit into this message, but here's a few key operational highlights:

1991 saw the start of vehicle standardisation with the introduction of Mazda T4000 Rescue Trucks.

In 1995 VICSES joined Police, Fire and Ambulance with a centralised Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system – which meant for the first time, VICSES was dispatched to 000 calls concurrently with other emergency service organisations.

2004 saw the opening of Narre Warren Unit – the first new unit in more than 20 years.

In 2005 VICSES really came of age, being established as a Statutory Authority in its own right, instead of a business unit

within the Department of Justice. VICSES became recognised as a peer emergency service, supported by a new VICSES Act, and further funding for vehicles and equipment, including \$1 million to ensure wet weather gear could be issued individually to members.

In 2007 VICSES together with the Country Fire Authority commenced introducing the Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System (AIIIMS) as our Incident Management System, and in 2008 together we introduced the Operations Information Management System (OIMS).

2010 saw two brand new units in growth corridors including Whittlesea and Wyndham West.

After the tragic events of the 2009 Bushfires which heavily impacted Kinglake and Marysville Units, and subsequent drought and floods of 2010-2011, the *Emergency Management Act 2013* was created which saw the mantra of **#WeWorkAsOne** introduced. This resulted in changes to each of the responder agency Acts, requiring each to provide resources during major emergencies. The floods resulted in an increase in a small number of staff to support volunteers - namely Operations Managers, VSOs and Community Resilience Coordinators.

In 2013 we were funded to pilot Land Based Swift Water Rescue and commenced Steep and High Angle Rescue.

2017 saw the government sign a Memorandum of Understanding with VICSES and the Municipal Association of Victoria to facilitate long-term leases with VICSES units on minimal or nominal rent.

In 2018 funding was announced for replacement facilities for several units along with seven new units (Aintree, Cranbourne, Clyde, Devon Meadows, Officer, Point Cook, Kalkallo) and a Satellite at Skye – with the first four new units becoming operational in 2024, bolstering our capability with 140 new volunteers and 12 new vehicles.

Since then, VICSES has seen an increased frequency and impact resulting from our hazards - floods, storms, and landslides, along with providing support to other agencies. In the last 10 years we've seen a 300% increase in support to Ambulance Victoria, and a 77% increase in support to Victoria Police. Our response to road crash rescues exceeded 2,000 in the 2023-24 financial year for the first time.

None of us anticipated the significant role we would play during a pandemic - supporting the early COVID-19 testing sites, providing relief to communities in the public housing towers, and supporting Victoria Police with border closures and the ring of steel.

Our members have also continued to play a greater role during bushfires like reloading firebombing aircraft, staging area

and base camp management, and deploying air monitoring kits for the Environment Protection Authority to name just a few integral support roles.

In our 50th anniversary year, we have much to celebrate and look forward to. This includes the commencement of a program to build 56 new Heavy Rescue Trucks, along with the promise of \$7.5 million annually ongoing for fleet. 2026 will see new units established at Kalkallo and Clyde, Devon Meadows and brand-new facilities for the VICSES Bannockburn, Heathcote, Kilmore, and Rochester Units.

Throughout our 50 years, there is one thing that has remained a constant - the selflessness of our people who serve our communities. VICSES is built on an amazing volunteer workforce, backed by a relatively small team of staff, who together are focused on doing whatever they can for communities across the state and beyond.

Jumping to December 2024 and most recently the announcement of VICSES now being incorporated as part of the new the Emergency Services and Volunteer Fund, I can only see a brighter future for VICSES. I am sure VICSES will continue to grow from strength to strength. **It is a proud time to be VICSES - 50 years young! Stay safe out there.**

Kind regards,

**Tim Wiebusch**  
VICSES Chief  
Officer Operations



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Interim Chief  
Executive Officer

Minister for  
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### Before VICSES

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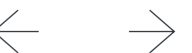
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## BEFORE VICSES

# Our history: Victoria Civil Defence Organisation

By Gabi Barkmeyer, Senior Advisor Corporate Communications and Brand, VHO

Before the establishment of VICSES in 1975, the service was formerly known as the Victoria Civil Defence Organisation, formed in 1950. Here's a look at our founding history:



Brian Rickard PSM MAIES in full Civil Defence uniform.

Following World War II, ongoing global unrest and conflict continued, including the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (1945), the Cold War (1947-1991) and the Korean War (1950-1953). The fear of escalating warfare resonated across the world, including attacks on home soil here in Australia.

In 1950, countries as part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) including the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as allied non-NATO countries including Australia, re-activated their volunteer-based Civil Defence services,

which were originally founded during World War II.

During these early years, the training of Civil Defence volunteers was solely focused on preparing for, responding to, and recovering from war, with a particular focus on nuclear weapons attacks.

"It was a bit of a 'Dad's Army'," recalls Brian Rickard PSM MAIES, a former member of the Civil Defence and a pioneer of the VICSES that we know today.

"We had a lot of ex-army gear, and no one was really interested in joining."

As the threat of war eased into the 1960s, our Australian Civil

Defence Organisation pivoted to focus on responding to natural disasters. By 1972, around 100 volunteer Civil Defence Units were located across the country, and the Victoria State Parliament passed the *State Emergency Services and Civil Defence Act*, which formerly legislated the role of the Victoria Civil Defence Organisation.

In 1975, the Victoria Civil Defence Organisation was officially renamed as Victoria State Emergency Service, to conform with other states across Australia.

We've come a long way since our Civil Defence days, which have shaped who we are as an organisation today. At our core has always been the strength of volunteerism, and the safety of our communities.

**And the rest, is history. ■**



Civil Defence 1940s



## WHO WE ARE TODAY:

# Victoria State Emergency Service

By Gabi Barkmeyer, Senior Advisor Corporate Communications and Brand, VHO

Today, VICSES has grown to include over 5,000 volunteers and more than 340 staff.

Our volunteers operate from 154 units across the state, in addition to 16 permanently staffed offices in regional and metro locations.

Our volunteers are the backbone of our organisation, making up over

93% of our total membership and serving our communities 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year.

VICSES is a significant contributor and leader in emergency management and has been involved in most major emergency responses in Victoria since our establishment. This includes flood and storm emergencies, rescues, fire support, and much more.



VICSES Emerald Unit

VICSES also provides the largest road rescue network in Australia, with 104 road crash rescue accredited units operating across the state. ■

### Control agency for:



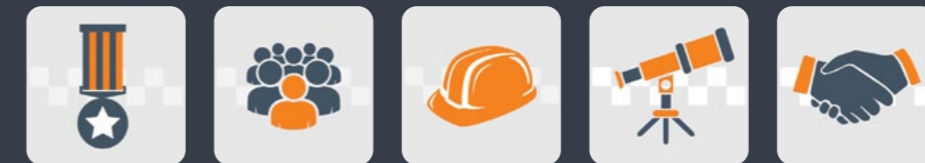
### Our Vision:

Safer Communities – Together

### Our Mission:

Partner with communities, government, other agencies, and business to provide timely and effective emergency management services, building community preparedness, disaster resilience and contributing to risk prevention.

### Our Values:



We pride ourselves on our credibility

We are part of our community

Safety drives our decisions

Focused and adaptable

Together we are VICSES

The Ministry for Police and Emergency Services was created, which included VICSES and our partner organisations.

The *Victoria State Emergency Service Act* was passed, recognising VICSES as a general emergency management agency.

On 1 November, VICSES was established as an independent Statutory Authority.



On 5 March 2025, VICSES celebrates 50 years serving our communities and the contributions of our people.

## OUR TIMELINE

1950

VICSES was established as a volunteer based Civil Defence Organisation.

1972

Parliament passed the *State Emergency Services and Civil Defence Act*, formally legislating the role of the Victoria Civil Defence Organisation.

1975

The Victoria Civil Defence Organisation was renamed the Victoria State Emergency Service to conform to other states.



1979

The Ministry for Police and Emergency Services was created, which included VICSES and our partner organisations.

1981

The *Victoria State Emergency Service Act* was passed, recognising VICSES as a general emergency management agency.

2005

On 1 November, VICSES was established as an independent Statutory Authority.

2025



On 5 March 2025, VICSES celebrates 50 years serving our communities and the contributions of our people.

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# The events that made us

By Gabi Barkmeyer, Senior Advisor Corporate Communications and Brand, VHO

From 1975, VICSES has played an integral role in responding to major emergencies here in Victoria. Here's a look at some of our most historic, and challenging emergency events:

**1983**

## 1983 ASH WEDNESDAY

In February 1983, more than 180 fires raged across Victoria. VICSES volunteers were deployed to assist our partner fire agencies, working tirelessly to supply resources and logistics, clear roads, and evacuate residents. The fires saw the largest number of volunteers called to duty across Australia at the time – an estimated 130,000 personnel.

**2009**

## 2009 BLACK SATURDAY

During the Black Saturday Bushfires 90 VICSES units and over 600 volunteers were deployed to provide fire support, in addition to storm damage response. Fire support provided included assisting with the clearance of roads by cutting up and removing trees, providing lighting



2009 Black Saturday Kinglake Unit

**2010**

## 2010 VICTORIA HAILSTORM

In March 2010 severe thunderstorms developed across parts of the state, with a 'super cell' thunderstorm hitting metropolitan Melbourne bringing widespread flash flooding and major hail damage. Hailstones measuring 2-10cm caused damage to homes and major buildings,

resulting in the largest hailstorm ever recorded in Melbourne's history. VICSES received over 7,800 RFAs for this event, which at the time was the largest single emergency that VICSES volunteers had responded to in terms of calls for assistance.



2010 Hail Storm

**2011**

## 2011 CHRISTMAS DAY STORMS

On 25 December 2011 severe thunderstorms struck Melbourne city and the surrounding suburbs, seeing huge hailstones, torrential rain, flash flooding, and even an issued tornado warning. VICSES received more than 4,200 RFAs, with SES

volunteers from New South Wales and South Australia also deployed to support our crews. 11 homes were made uninhabitable. At the time, the Insurance Council of Australia estimated that costs would exceed \$100 million after 20,000 claims were received in just five days.



2010 Hail Storm

## 2010 VICTORIAN FLOODS

In 2010, persistent low-pressure systems associated with extraordinary tropical moisture led to Victoria recording its wettest January on record. Heavy rainfall and flash flooding persisting from 9-15 January causing widespread flooding, and then again from 4-6 February. VICSES responded to more than 17,500 RFAs, and more than 600,000 sandbags were deployed to support mitigation works. This is one of Victoria's worst flooding events, with communities completely devastated by flood damage. The residual effects of heavy rainfall and riverine flooding continued to impact some communities into March.



2010 Victorian Floods



2010 Victorian Floods

**2013**

## 2013 SEVERE WIND EVENT

A series of cold fronts resulted in severe weather warnings for damaging winds across the state from 25 September to 1 October. VICSES received 8,229 RFAs, with over 6,200 located in Melbourne and the surrounding suburbs alone. At peak times call rates to our 132 500 number were as high as eight calls per minute. The Bureau of Meteorology advised that the winds were the worst that Victoria had experienced within the five years, with speeds as high as 165km/hr in Wilsons Promontory and 100km/hr in St Kilda.



2019-2020 Bushfires

**2019**

## 2019-2020 VICTORIAN BUSHFIRES

During the 2019-2022 summer season, bushfires burned more than 1.5 million hectares of public and private land, destroying more than 400 homes, 6,800 livestock animals, and the loss of five lives. VICSES provided integral support for our fire partners at state and regional levels, including Incident Management Team roles in warnings, logistics and public information, ground support and base camp support, Incident Controllers, State and Regional Agency Commanders, and much more. In addition, for the first time ever a multi-agency road crash rescue group was established and deployed into fire affected areas, which VICSES volunteers responded as part of.



2019-2020 Bushfires

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# FEATURE



2021 June Storms

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## 2021 JUNE STORMS



2021 June Storms

The severe storms that impacted Victorians in June 2021 remains one of our most historic storm events to-date. Seeing destructive winds and heavy rainfall, from 8 June to 8 July 128 of our units responded to over 10,280 RFAs, including 7,776 trees down, 1,198 counts of building damage, and 350 flooding events – our busiest week on record. Some of our units including Lilydale and Emerald received a year’s worth of RFAs in

just 48 hours – a mammoth, and challenging task at hand. At the height of the storm event, over 320,000 people across the state were without power. By the end of the event, over 2,300 initial impact assessments had been conducted with 129 properties deemed uninhabitable. Response to support communities was further challenged by the COVID-19 environment.

## 2021 EARTHQUAKE

On 22 September a magnitude 5.8 earthquake occurred near Mansfield, which was felt throughout Victoria and even beyond state borders. This is the largest on shore earthquake event in Victoria’s recorded history.

As the control agency for earthquake, VICSES received almost 130 RFAs for building damage. The earthquake also prompted the temporary closure of some major infrastructure, including the West Gate Bridge and Melbourne Airport to allow for inspections.



2022-23 Statewide Flooding



20  
22

2022-23 Statewide Flooding

## 2024 JANUARY TROPICAL SEVERE STORMS

In early January the Bureau of Meteorology advised that severe storms were likely to impact multiple districts across Victoria, which produced heavy rainfall that led to flash flooding, localised large hail, and damaging winds. During the period of operations from 2-20 January, VICSES responded to over 4,000 RFAs, including 1,692 for trees down, 1,260 for flood, and 612 for building damage.



2024 January Tropical Storms



2024 January Tropical Storms

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24

## 2022-23 STATEWIDE FLOODING

A declared La Niña brought periods of heavy and intense rainfall from the beginning of October 2022, seeing an 89-day Declared Operation though to 3 January 2023, with severe flooding impacts that would result in one of Victoria’s most historic flood events to-date.

October 2022 marked the wettest month ever recorded for Victoria, with rainfall more than double the 1961-1990 October average of 64.6mm. During the period of operations, VICSES received over 20,000 RFAs. 13,689 of these RFAs were in October alone, marking our busiest month in VICSES history.

More than 1,500 flood rescues were undertaken, and 1.2 million sandbags deployed. Of the 6,097 property impact assessments undertaken, 976 properties were deemed uninhabitable. The contributions of our members during this time was extraordinary, with some our volunteers responding to support their communities even while their own properties were impacted by devastating flooding.



2021 October Storms

## 2021 OCTOBER STORMS

From 28 October damaging winds and intense rainfall impacted parts of the state, leading to widespread flash flooding and storm damage. During the period of operations, VICSES received over 9,890 RFAs, with over 7,600 of these for metropolitan Melbourne and the surrounding suburbs. 526,000 properties were without power, making it one of the largest power outage events in the state’s history.



2021 October Storms



2024 February Storms

## 2024 FEBRUARY STORMS

Tuesday 13 February saw the State Control Centre activated to Tier 3 (Red) and Total Fire Bans issued throughout multiple districts, with the forecast of Catastrophic and Extreme Fire Danger Ratings due to high temperatures, along with damaging winds across most of the state. A severe thunderstorm warning was issued for damaging winds and large hailstones for the Melbourne area, and more general thunderstorm warnings in place for several other parts of Victoria.

Storms began to impact the state from the afternoon and into the early hours of 14 February, seeing damaging and destructive winds and heavy rainfall. Impacts were widespread, with power outages affecting more than 535,000 customers across the state. VICSES received over 6,700 RFAs during the period of declared operations from 13-29 February, with 60% of the RFAs received in the first 48 hours. ■

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## THEN AND NOW:

# A history of our fleet

By Tom Stewart, Photographer and Fleet Enthusiast

### 1950s: CIVIL DEFENCE

Our founding organisation the Victoria Civil Defence Organisation was focused on supporting our country's military response in the face of war.

Being volunteer led with limited funding, members equipped the service as best they could. This included donated vehicles of varied makes and models, which established an eclectic fleet.



1956 Austin Morris J2 Omni – Seymour Unit



1957 Austin 101 Van – Swan Hill

### 1970s – VICSES

Seeing the establishment of VICSES in 1975, our fleet received a make-over, with updated branding and decals including the formal VICSES emblem.

In addition, red emergency lights replaced the previous yellow lights, which were more recognisable as being attributed to an emergency event.

1972 International D1310 – Leongatha Unit



1970 International C1600 – Phillip Island Unit



1977 Ford F-150 – Rosedale Unit

Over the last 50 years we've undergone many transformations, including the evolution of our fleet of emergency service vehicles.

Our vehicles are integral to our emergency response, requiring the capability to turn out to an emergency quickly, and be kitted with essential equipment and technology to get the job done.

Here's a look at the history and evolution of our vehicles as part of VICSES.

### 1960s

The 1960's saw an increase in yellow vehicles as part of our fleet with yellow emergency lights. Although hard to miss, this colour was eventually phased out in the 1990s, with the resale value of yellow cars much lower.

### 1980s

The 1980's saw the introduction of red and blue emergency lights, which are standard across most emergency service vehicles today.



1985 Ford Trader Dual Cab - Nhill Unit

### 1990s

The 1990s saw the start of vehicle standardisation, with the introduction of Mazda T4000 Rescue Trucks. We also began to phase out our yellow vehicles in favour of white and introduced an orange check design decal.



1991 Ford F-250 – Warragul Unit



1996 Ford Trader St Kilda Unit

### 2000 – 2025:

## Our fleet today

From the 2000s we moved to standardise our fleet right across the service, with modern vehicles designed to be fit-for-purpose for our emergency response.

Today, our fleet comprises of around 700 vehicles including light, medium, and heavy rescue trucks, and support and transport vehicles.



2024 Hino FE Crew Cab - Prototype Next Generation Heavy Rescue Truck



2008 Nissan Y61 GU6 Patrol ST – Heidelberg

In 2024 we showcased a prototype of our custom-built Next Generation Heavy Rescue Truck, which includes exciting features such as enhanced ergonomic design, LED and cabin door lighting, a passenger facing iPad mount, wind speed detection capability, dedicated storage for food and hydration for extended operations, a chainsaw work bench, and improved locker storage for easy access to equipment.

This new truck paves the way for the future of our vehicles, bolstering our fleet and our emergency response. ■



2015 Mercedes Benz NCV3 Sprinter 516CDI – Nillumbik Unit



**Check out the fleet pull-out poster included in this edition!**

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## OUR STORIES

# VICSES Leongatha Unit: A trip down memory lane

By Allison Norfolk, Community Resilience Coordinator, Eastern Region

Val Bremner and Chas Baillie have been long standing members at VICSES Leongatha Unit. With a combined 84 years of service, they have plenty of memories to share.

Both members have been involved in many operations including storms, floods, landslides, road crash rescues, searches, and have even had their 15 minutes of fame having been featured in an ABC TV series!

Chas started his VICSES journey back in 1977 when the unit was in its infancy, operating out of the back of the Leongatha Ambulance Station in a primitive shed. In those days the unit had a one light truck with a canvas awning and small trailer with just a few hand tools. Back then, the overalls were blue, and the hats were made of tin.

Val started as a VICSES volunteer back in 1989. After trying other volunteering avenues, Val wasn't fulfilled with making cakes, sewing, or knitting. Instead, she wanted an opportunity to get hands on. Jim Parks, a member at that time,

encouraged her to join VICSES, saying "I know where you belong, you'll fit in well here". Turns out he was right, as she has been a VICSES member ever since.

Val and Chas joined VICSES to give back to their community and they have generously and skilfully done so for 48 years (Chas) and 36 years (Val). Both have received accolades from state and local government. Val received recognition from Melina Bath, Member for Eastern Victorian Region for services during the Eastern Victorian 2019-2020 Bushfires, giving "a special mention to Day Duty Officer Val Bremner, an awesome lady, for 30 years serving our community". Chas received the Citizen of the Year award from the South Gippsland Shire in 2007.

Chas has been deployed on several occasions to areas including Caldwell in Queensland and Geraldton in Western Australia

following cyclones. When it came to deployment, Val preferred to stay back at the unit in her role as Daytime Duty Officer or to manage the radios.

Both Val and Chas assisted the Country Fire Authority with the Black Summer fire event in 2019-2020. One of Val's many tasks was to help put up around 200 tents for firefighters in Benambra, East Gippsland, all while watching out for the many snakes that were escaping the fires.

One of Chas' fondest memories is of the Horsepower Training Camps that used to be held in the bush at Mirboo North. Members from different units would come together over a weekend to camp, training in various scenarios. One of these scenarios was a search and rescue exercise, where a member was sent out into the bush to be found

by the trainees. On this occasion, they searched high and low for the member only to realise he was hidden back at base camp.

Other training exercises were held at the disused Yallourn Power Station where rescues at heights were practised. You will note from the image above, that they used to slide people down a ladder, quite different from today's high angle rescue!

Now in their seventies, they are both still active members, noting that at the time of this interview Chas had been to a 3:00am call-out the same day! In the motivational words of Val, "We have no plans of retiring anytime soon, just keep moving!"

A huge thank you to Val and Chas for their service over the years. They are incredible! ■



Leongatha Unit pre 1975 - Civil Defence



Road crash rescue - Leongatha Unit



Road crash rescue - Leongatha Unit

## Historical snapshot: VICSES Echuca Unit

By Matthew Scott, Deputy Controller, VICSES Echuca Unit

The VICSES Echuca Unit is a small, yet mighty team of 30 dedicated community members, who turn up for training every Monday evening and attend to local requests for assistance.

This has been a similar theme over the past 50 years for the unit, which was first registered in 1975.

Like many VICSES units, Echuca started out at a site owned by the Shire

of Campaspe. However, an important milestone for the unit and the local community was the opening of their new upgraded local headquarters on Saturday 14 October, 2017.

The formal opening of the unit was undertaken by the former VICSES Chief Executive Officer, Stephen Griffin. At the time of the opening, the unit had 14 members. Over time it has been great to see the numbers of members grow in both operational and ancillary capacities.

Echuca Unit is currently located on High Street, and housed with Ambulance Victoria, Country Fire Authority and Echuca Moama Search and Rescue. "It makes sense for all of the emergency service bodies to be in one location" said Campaspe Shire Councillor Judith O'Farrell. ■



2012 Echuca Unit

## VICSES Peer Support: Promoting mental wellbeing since 1989

By Alison Wright, Health and Wellbeing Coordinator, VHO

The VICSES Peer Support program was started in 1989 by Patricia (Pat) Murdoch, a VICSES volunteer and psychologist. Known at the time as the Peer Assistance Link Program, the pilot was conducted in the Goulburn Valley Region with just eight volunteers.

This inaugural Peer Support team had a dual role, which was to support units after traumatic events (now known as potentially traumatic events) and to provide training to help VICSES members manage stress and build resilience. By the

end of 1991 the program had been rolled out across the state.

Over the past 35 years, the Peer Support team has played a vital role in taking care of our members. With Pre-incident Awareness Training (PIAT) delivered regularly to units and support provided to

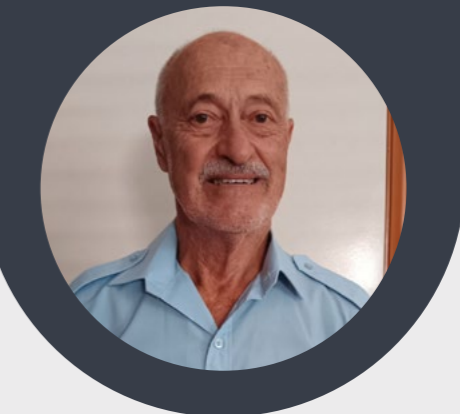
units after their attendance at a potentially traumatic event, the team also provide confidential support to individuals, including both current and past members. Since its establishment, Peer Support has become an integral part of our organisation. Some of the major incidents the team has been involved in include the 2006 Commonwealth Games, 2009 Bushfires, 2011 Victorian Floods, 2011 Cyclone Yasi in North Queensland, 2017 Bourke Street attack, and the 2019-20 Victorian Bushfires.

## Spotlight on Wayne McKindley

By Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO

Wayne McKindley joined as a VICSES volunteer in January 1977. He has held multiple roles throughout his time with us, including Unit Controller at the VICSES Heywood Unit. Looking back on his volunteering experiences, Wayne said "I think over the years it's assisted me greatly with my development on a personal basis. But just generally, being able to assist people when they need support, that means a fair bit."

After nearly 50 years, Wayne is showing no signs of slowing down. "It's important because I've been there from the start of our local unit - we built it up, trained a lot of people, got a lot of good equipment now, and I'd hate to see it fold up. I'd like to see it keep going. We provide an excellent resource and service to the community," he said. ■



At the end of 2024 the Peer Support team consisted of 67 volunteers, who between them have delivered 82 PIAT sessions and have been activated 428 times for unit and individual support. A far cry from the small team of eight in 1989, but with the same commitment to their fellow VICSES members, ensuring everyone has access to ongoing support.

If you are interested in finding out more about becoming a Peer Support Officer email us at [wellbeing@ses.vic.gov.au](mailto:wellbeing@ses.vic.gov.au) ■

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**OUR STORIES**

# History of Craigieburn Unit with Kevin O'Callaghan

By Gabi Barkmeyer, Senior Advisor Corporate Communications and Brand, VHO

Established in 1981, VICSES Craigieburn Unit has been turning out to support their community for around 45 years. Founding member Kevin O'Callaghan takes us through his journey, and how the service has evolved over time.

**K**evin moved to the Craigieburn area in 1978. With a background as an ex-army reservist and a passion for helping others, Kevin knew he wanted to get involved in supporting the community somehow.

"We knew two or three family friends that had been killed up on the Hume Highway in vehicle incidents," says Kevin. "Back then, the closest responding crew was a St John Ambulance Rescue Unit that operated out of Broadmeadows... but you can imagine the time it took to get to rescues in Craigieburn. So, the VICSES Craigieburn Unit was established, and I decided to join."



Opening of the Craigieburn Unit Headquarters

Starting up the unit back in the '80s wasn't an easy feat, especially with limited funding. "Almost all our members came from ex-army reservists, Scouts, and St John Ambulance," explains Kevin. "We were given small amounts of equipment by VICSES, but most of it was our own hand tools. Getting our first set of jaws of life was a game changer – it was extremely difficult to open a car with a crowbar back then. We'd get our vehicles through auctions, like ex-fire service vehicles, and convert them ourselves – all the units did the same. Now, you'd never attempt any of this. But we just went in and did it."

A couple of years after the unit was up and running, they responded to their first major emergency – the devastating Ash Wednesday Bushfires.

"We were clearing roads from fallen trees and taking welfare up to Mount Macedon. There wasn't enough water, and trains were arriving to feed water directly to the fire trucks, and we helped run those staging areas."

Responding to emergencies can be physically, and mentally challenging. In 1995, Kevin joined VICSES Peer Support and spent 14 years providing wellbeing support to VICSES volunteers across the state.

"We always had that mentality that we had to look after our own... but some people had the attitude of 'toughen up'. I can remember a couple of incidents where we were dealing with child fatalities... you had to really look after people coming out of that. Because we all had young families at the time – I had four young girls. You go to an incident, and there's kids involved their age."

Volunteering alongside managing work and family life isn't easy, and as Kevin explains, wouldn't be possible without family support and the unique bond of the unit.

"VICSES wouldn't exist if families didn't support our volunteers. If my wife hadn't supported me, I wouldn't be doing it," says Kevin. "She ended up joining the

unit as an associate member in 1986 and still helps out. One of my daughters also joined for 10 years... her husband was even a part of the unit!"

"I've got friends now from the unit that I made 40 years ago. You develop a trust with people that's not found in other friendships – it's a trust that goes beyond that," continues Kevin.

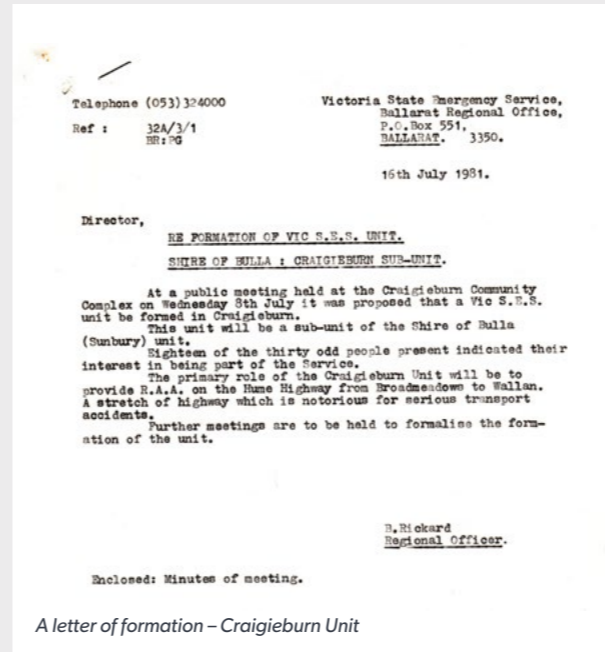
Looking towards the future, Kevin's proud of how far the unit and the service has come.

"Our fleet has improved massively. Now we have new vehicles that are purpose built, and consistent across the service. Our Personal Protective Clothing is also the best it's ever been. When we joined, probably about 70% of our kit was sought for and purchased by ourselves – some of it second hand, and all different."

"I'm also really proud of our unit facility. Originally, the internal fittings came out of an old factory. Over time, the way our unit has been rebuilt and expanded has been exceptional – including our museum, which includes memorabilia from our SES and Civil Defence days."

Overall, Kevin says the most rewarding feeling is seeing their unit members develop their skills.

"To me, the one critical thing is when you see someone you've trained go in and run a rescue. As a unit we've trained around



A letter of formation – Craigieburn Unit

300 volunteers to respond to road crash rescues. It's really all about watching the crew do their stuff."

It's been a journey, and it's volunteers like Kevin who continue to turn out over so many years that exemplifies the

dedication of volunteering. So, what's on the horizon for Kevin?

"I turn 70 this year...another chap at the unit is 68, another 67. We can still do the job. But I know my daughters will crack it if I'm anywhere near a ladder!" ■



Door knock Kev and Dave – Craigieburn Unit



Craigieburn Unit Museum

## The VICSES Nillumbik Unit's history with the National Disaster Rescue Competition

By Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO



Nillumbik Unit competing at the National Disaster Rescue Competition

From the 1990s-2000s, the VICSES Nillumbik Unit were regular competitors in the National Disaster Rescue Competition. They were strong contestants, having placed many times, and with a four-year streak of wins under their belt.

**T**he competition involves eight different rescue activities which go for 45-60 minutes, over the course of one to two days. These activities could include anything from using compasses and maps during a simulated bush rescue exercise, to road crash rescue, and using river ropes to perform vertical rescue (now known as high angle rescue).

Contenders participate in teams of eight, and are judged on adhering to time limits, as well as their levels of skill and precision. "It was a terrific opportunity for us to work on our skills, I think ideally we would still be doing more of these activities" said Nillumbik Unit volunteer Justin Kibell. ■



Nillumbik Unit competing at the National Disaster Rescue Competition

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# Reflecting on the VICSES Brimbank Unit



Feature image: 2011 hailstorm

By Lauren Castle, Corporate Communications Advisor, VHO

When police needed a helping hand to respond to a plane crash impacting an Essendon home in the early '80s, community members decided it was time they had their own VICSES unit.

Many council meetings later, the VICSES Brimbank Unit (formerly the VICSES Keilor Unit), was established in 1982. The founding crew worked from a humble tin garage they built themselves, which was eventually transformed into the building which continues to house the unit to this day.

Former chef and lifelong Brimbank local Ray Brown joined the unit

mere months after it was formed. He was motivated by his desire to give back to the community and inspired by his experience in the Army Reserves to give volunteering with VICSES a go. He would later become Unit Controller from 1996-2004, and remains operational at the unit today.

Ray notes that in the early days, the crew had to raise their own funds to purchase their uniforms and essential equipment. To fundraise for their first truck, the team was contracted by local council to replace the boarding on the Arundle Bridge in Keilor. "Our Unit Controller at the time was a draftsman and he got us onto the opportunity", said Ray.

Brimbank Unit has seen a range of incidents unfold over the years. The most significant operations included aircraft crashes near the Essendon Airport and assisting fire services in events such as Ash Wednesday in 1983 and the Coode Island fires in 1991. VICSES volunteers were tasked with providing lighting

utilising their vehicles and standalone equipment during nighttime response.

In December 2011 on Christmas Day, the unit faced their largest operational challenge in history when an intense, isolated hailstorm hit the Brimbank area. Brimbank was subjected to hail stones the size of golf balls, causing mass destruction to property throughout the area.

Brimbank Unit received over 1,500 requests for assistance on the first day of impact. This figure expanded exponentially in the coming days, with crews deployed from New South Wales and South Australia SES units to assist with

the damage. 27 VICSES units from across the state also assisted.

After all these years, Ray is proud to be part of a professional volunteer-based service. "People used to laugh" said Ray, "but with all the developments we've had over the years and increased support, our training, uniforms and equipment are all at a professional standard and this is recognised in our community". ■



1970s - Brimbank Unit

## Interview with Ross Hutton, founding member of the VICSES South Barwon Unit

By Alex Suwitra, Community Resilience Coordinator, Western Region

Ross Hutton is a familiar face around Geelong and at VICSES. A South Barwon Unit member since its inception in 1977, Ross was more than happy to share a few insights into his time as a VICSES volunteer.

### Can you tell us about what the South Barwon Unit was like when it first started?

"The VICSES South Barwon Unit started with a mix of members from the Rover Scouts and the local Apex Club, plus some extras like me. Bill Heath was our Unit Controller, with Peter Caldwell as his Deputy Controller, and

our members wore dark blue overalls with army surplus boots and a hard hat (no wet weather gear or reflective tape in sight!). Our members were young and enthusiastic and ready to take on the challenge of responding to emergencies in our community."

"There was no paging system back then, so members would call each other in a 'phone tree' when we received a request for assistance (RFA), and all head down to the local headquarters to respond. Originally, we responded with a trailer of equipment stored at the council depot which was towed by our personal vehicles. South Barwon Unit's first unit vehicle was a Toyota Dyna Twin Cab truck, donated by Belmont Rotary Club. This was followed by a Ford F100 which was bought by the council



Ross Hutton Rescue 1970s

as a cab chassis. We built the body of the truck in my garage at home, with the front bar work completed by Gordon TAFE. Our vehicles were often second-hand vehicles sprayed yellow or white and fitted with orange lights, rather than the red and blue lights and sirens we are familiar with on emergency vehicles today."

### How was training different when you first started at VICSES to now?

"All our training was undertaken in-house, and I wrote a lot of our original training and assessment material which was also shared with the State Training Officer when that role was established. This included training material on using all our equipment, ranging from generators to the new hydraulic rescue tools like the Jaws of Life."

### What are some memories that stand out from over the years?

"I have many memories from across my years with VICSES. I recall South Barwon's first road crash

rescue call-out which involved a collision between a mini and a meat truck in front of the Post Office on the corner of Ryrie and Gheringhap Streets in central Geelong. Thankfully there was a good outcome for that rescue. We had our first overnight stay for a VICSES activity in Ballarat, when our crew competed in a rescue competition on AFL Grand Final weekend – we didn't get the win, but it was our first attempt at a rescue competition. We had plenty of opportunities to deploy elsewhere to help communities following storms and floods, including in Frankston, Dandenong and St Albans to name a few."

### What do you think the future holds for VICSES?

"It's hard to say what the future will look like for VICSES – what vehicles and equipment we'll be using, how we'll communicate and how we'll be turned out to RFAs. What I do know is that we've come a long way, and I'm excited for what comes next." ■



Ross Hutton receives award from Alistair Drayton

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## Mansfield Mounted Branch

By Gerard Mahoney, Mansfield Unit, Eastern Region

In the 1990's, VICSES Mansfield Unit established a mounted branch with around 25 members.

Many of the members already owned horses and were happy to transport them wherever they could to support the unit.

Most of the mounted branch members were from the high country and knew the local area well. The branch was the most valuable during land searches – it was so much easier to travel on horseback through the scrub rather than hiking the steep terrain. Being on horseback also allowed members to scan a much wider area.

The branch closed after only a few years, but was certainly an asset to the unit while it was active.

Giddy-up! ■





## OUR STORIES

# Ged celebrates 50 years of community service

By Glenn Mercer, Community Resilience Coordinator, Eastern Region

Ged Mahoney has spent an incredible 50 years serving his community with VICSES. This milestone highlights his dedication to serving the community when they are most in need.

During these 50 years, Mr Mahoney has been an integral part of the VICSES Mansfield Unit. The unit was formed from a group from the Mansfield Apex Club, and it wasn't long after the initial forming that Ged was convinced to join. In 1975 the Civil Defence became VICSES, as it is known today.

Ged fondly recalls seeing significant change over this time

from being issued with a tin hat, pocketknife, and blue overalls to the well known orange personal protective clothing and light weight helmets you see today.

Ged reflected that "originally members would respond in their own vehicles, and then the unit felt extremely fortunate when receiving their first vehicle, a Land Rover series II that was donated."



Left to right: Danny Dowell, Stacey Mahoney, Ged Mahoney and Chris Brockwell



*"The unit grew from first meeting at the Ambulance Station, moving to the old Railway's Goods Shed, and finally around the 1980s building their own headquarters where they are today, now complete with room for three vehicles, kitchen, training room, communications room, and bathroom facilities."*

Mansfield Unit Controller Roslyn Fauvel noted that Mr Mahoney is a highly valued member of the Mansfield Unit and congratulated him on reaching

this significant milestone. Ged continues to volunteer his time with the unit by participating in community engagement activities. ■

# Celebrating Ken Boddinar's 45 years of service

By Rachel Rogers, Community Resilience Coordinator, Eastern Region



Ken Boddinar



Ken Boddinar's service at VICSES began in 1976 in a volunteer position which launched his long standing and respectable 45-year career.

In 1975 while Ken was working in the fisheries and wildlife sector, he met Regional Director John Glass who was setting up the new VICSES regional office. Ken offered to start answering the phone for John. This began Ken's volunteer role in supporting the setup of Shepparton, Kerang, Swan Hill and eventually Bendigo regional VICSES offices. During this time, Ken also developed the training and capacity to use flood rescue

boats for VICSES among other contributions.

After 19 years volunteering, John encouraged and supported Ken's application for employment as Training Officer for our then Central Region. Becoming a staff member meant Ken had to give up his volunteer status. In April 1986, when Ken turned up on his first day to his new empty office location, he thought it was a prank! However, it was at the VICSES Headquarters where Ken met

Johny Howe, Brad Beckworth, Joe Buffon, Lance Jennison, and Laurie Waters, and gained an interest in emergency management. With the team all encouraging Ken to apply for the Regional Operations Emergency Management position in Bairnsdale, he applied successfully and spent the next 25 years in the role.

Ken has accumulated a lifetime of stories and experience, and we will all fondly recall Ken's commitment to our volunteers, training, and skill building, as well as his dedication to his various roles as a volunteer and staff member both in Victoria and on interstate deployments. Ken has contributed

significantly to the development and success of VICSES while forming friendships which continue well after his uniform a hung up in November 2023.

We thank Ken, his wife Amanda and their children for their support to VICSES and wish the Boddinar family all the best for their future endeavours. ■



Doc and Mary

# Tallangatta celebrates members' service to community

By Glenn Mercer, Community Resilience Coordinator, Eastern Region

Barry 'Doc' Grant and Mary Aldrich have been awarded the VICSES Unit Life Membership award for their significant and dedicated service to the community. Both members have been an integral part of the VICSES Tallangatta Unit over a significant period.

The VICSES Unit Life Member Award recognises volunteers who have served and provided leadership in their communities for over 20 years.

Mary has provided a selfless and dedicated contribution to the unit and continues to mentor, support, and lead others. Mary joined in 1985 and has been involved in roles of Communications Officer, Health and Safety Officer, and many others. Her commitment to the community was recognised

in 1995 when she was awarded Citizen of the Year.

Doc was one of the original members who established the Tallangatta Unit in 1974 (formerly Civil Defence). Doc has held roles including Maintenance Officer and has been a great mentor for training. He was also instrumental in campaigning for a new unit headquarters, having been a member of the Country Fire Authority and the scouting movement, which have provided him with transferable skills across all organisations.

Tallangatta Unit Controller Zac West said, "Doc has been a valued member of the unit with many years of experience and mentored members - his knowledge of ropes is unsurpassed, and he has instructed members in this vital skill."

"Mary has contributed selflessly to the unit in many ways and helped to mentor and provide support for others at all times," continued Zac.

It has been fantastic to recognise the significant service of these members within the unit who

support their community in times of need.

Tallangatta members Ross Bliim and Melanie Murray received VICSES Long Service Awards for their 15 years of service and were awarded a National Medal for their diligent service.

Operations Manager Chris Brockwell congratulated all members on significant achievements to VICSES and their community. ■

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**GOLDEN JUBILEE MEMBERS**

# Meet our Golden Jubilee members

By Dharni Giri, Gabi Barkmeyer, Lauren Castle and Ryan Malcolm, Community and Communications team, VHO

16 incredible volunteers have been with VICSES since 1975, and are still active in the service. We caught up with each of them to reflect on their experiences in the service over the last 50 years.

**T**ake us back to the early days of VICSES – what are your memories of the service then?



John Cook

“We ended up with a lot of war equipment, tarps, ropes and pulleys... all that sort of stuff. We used to have a lot of exercises between us involving camping out and setting up different rescue work, seeing which was the best approach and passing on our examples.”

**JOHN COOK**  
VICSES Tambo Valley Unit



Leigh Edwards

“Many years ago we had to raise funds to purchase equipment like the Jaws of Life through door knocking the town of Stawell. The Stawell Gold Mine arranged our first four wheel drive. This was used extensively not just for rescues in the mountains, but to pull the rescue trailer with the ‘jaws’ gear inside it. Our local doctor trained us in first aid and showed us how to extricate a patient from a wreck without using crow bars and crash axes like the way it used to be done. Worse still, he told us they used to use two tow trucks to pull the vehicles apart to get to the patient.”

**LEIGH EDWARDS**  
VICSES Stawell Unit



Wendy Witty

“The Swan Hill Unit’s first road crash rescue vehicle was a second-hand truck, purchased locally and painted bright yellow. Both Swan Hill City Council and Swan Hill Shire were very supportive, and in the early 1980s we moved into our own shed. We turned a small area at the back into an operations centre – no toilet or kitchen facilities though! That didn’t happen until the late ‘80s when our current local headquarters was added – only enough money for the outside walls, roof, and a toilet we were told. With an enormous amount of volunteer time and donations our building was completed, comprising the promised toilets, a kitchen, radio room, operations/training room and controller’s office. It was officially opened on 18 March 1989.”

**WENDY WITTY**  
VICSES Swan Hill Unit



- Brett Neve**, VICSES Frankston Unit
- Cliff Tan**, VICSES Colac Unit
- Colin Matheson**, VICSES Lilydale Unit
- David Fitzroy**, VICSES Alexandra Unit
- Denis Brain**, VICSES Footscray Unit
- Gerard Mahoney**, VICSES Mansfield Unit
- Graeme Edwards**, VICSES Stawell Unit
- Ian Sinclair**, VICSES Beechworth Unit
- John Cook**, VICSES Tambo Valley Unit
- Keith Barns**, VICSES Euroa Unit
- Leigh Edwards**, VICSES Stawell Unit
- Neville Lynch**, VICSES Euroa Unit
- Peter Weeks**, VICSES Alexandra Unit
- Robert Barns**, VICSES Euroa Unit
- Stan Hendy**, Loddon Mallee Regional Unit
- Wendy Witty**, VICSES Swan Hill Unit

**W**hy did you decide to volunteer with VICSES?



Cliff Tann

“I was moved to join the service following the drowning of a local woman at Princetown. This incident prompted the community to find a way of assisting the local police officer who was in charge of a large and isolated rural area. He frequently required assistance for searches, accidents, and in this case to search in the hope of retrieving a body. A meeting was called and several men including me became the first rescue squad in the Otways.”

**CLIFF TANN**  
VICSES Colac Unit

**W**hat roles with VICSES have been the most demanding, or rewarding?



Peter Weeks

“Being Controller is the most demanding, ensuring the unit is operational and members are trained, and skills maintained. The most rewarding achievement is having a team that is happy and working together in their various roles and acquiring new skills. Along with successful operations with good outcomes and making a difference for the community. The period during COVID-19 was one of the most demanding and difficult times of my life.”

**PETER WEEKS**  
VICSES Alexandra Unit



Graeme Edwards

“On moving to Stawell in 1972 I decided to join the local Civil Defence Unit to help out any way I could. Weekly radio schedules captured my interest first, talking with radio people all over the state and sometimes interstate. With searches I was the one to carry the heavy portable radio and the six foot (185cm) antenna – very difficult going under bushes or low trees. Next learning curve after knots and searches was first aid then road crash rescue. I am still doing operational communications today and searches whenever available.”

**GRAEME EDWARDS**  
VICSES Stawell Unit



Gerard Mahoney

“Search and rescue primarily. There are a few sad incidents that still stay with me to this day, but it is rewarding to know you’ve used your knowledge and expertise in the bush to help another person who might have had their worst day.”

**GERARD MAHONEY**  
VICSES Mansfield Unit

“I found I just loved the operations and planning side of the service, although I have of course trained in several aspects over the years. A highlight was being part of the all-girls road rescue team who competed at state level. Our annual unit ‘Duck Race’ on the Murray continues to raise valuable funds for our Swan Hill Unit, after 35 years of excitement cheering the plastic ducks along the river and the fun of retrieving and counting 2,000 ducks after the race.”

**WENDY WITTY**  
VICSES Swan Hill Unit

**W**hat are some of the most memorable emergency events or incidents you’ve responded to?



Colin Matheson

“A large storm (mini tornado) through the Eastern Metro area, when Lilydale had approximately 900 requests for assistance. Units from all over Victoria came to assist and the response went on for many weeks. The surrounding units were also inundated with their own calls. I’ve also been involved in several searches for missing people in the Kinglake area and have attended and supported at large statewide fire events.”

**COLIN MATHESON**  
VICSES Yarrowonga Unit



Ian Sinclair

“It was an animal rescue. A dog went over a bridge, so I rescued it by abseiling, being lowered off the bridge using the winch on the vehicle and tied the dog to the harness (figure of eight) and was winched back up. This happened circa 1980. On a platform nearby there were bystanders who applauded, so as any true hero would I bowed to the adoring crowd.”

**IAN SINCLAIR**  
VICSES Beechworth Unit

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## GOLDEN JUBILEE MEMBERS

**Y**ou've volunteered with VICSES for 50 years – what keeps you going, and why is it so important to you?

"When I set out to do something, I like to see it through to completion. I have had a vision for the unit as a Unit Officer and Controller. Working with a team and making a difference for the community, I don't want to let people down."

**PETER WEEKS**  
VICSES Alexandra Unit

"The people in my unit and the community. It's so important that community members have someone to seek help from who have the skillset to do so. We can calm and guide others, and bring the skills and knowledge that others may not have. We can also think of the obvious during a stressful situation when people might be floundering."

**BRETT NEVE**  
VICSES Frankston Unit



Neville Lynch

"Just being a part of something bigger, being a part of the camaraderie. It's lovely to meet the other volunteers at the other Driver Reviver sites. Meeting the community members who go through the Driver Reviver sites is also lovely, having a chat with them. As far as I'm concerned, I am still going to be part of it all as much as I can."

**NEVILLE LYNCH**  
VICSES Euroa Unit

**H**ow important has the support of family, friends, and even employers been during your journey with VICSES?

"My wife Rhonda joined the Nhill Unit around two years after I did, and she gave over 15 years of service – she received the National Medal for her involvement with VICSES."

During those early years we put a lot of time into the service, but they were very rewarding times knowing we were helping our community."

I have been fortunate to have been able to do a lot of interesting things during my time with VICSES, sometimes at very short notice and often away from home. For example, while I was a staff member there were several occasions that you would go to work in the morning and by the end of the day you could be at the other end of the state helping with a flood or storm event. Without supportive partners, family... you can't do these things, especially in emergency services. It really is a team effort."

**STAN HENDY**  
Loddon Mallee Regional Unit



Stan Hendy

"I've had great friendships in the unit, then they leave... then you make new friends. Friends come and go... but those friendships are still there. If I rang them up if I was in trouble, they'd be there. I've got one unit member who lives next door to me, Jim. When the pager goes off, we go together. We have a crew ready to go already!"

**T**ell us about some of your proudest, or fondest memories volunteering with VICSES.

"We used to do a lot of exercises, like when they built the Dartmouth Dam. We'd put boats on the Dart Dam for rescue, go down and get our ticket from Lakes Entrance to get permission to run an exercise, and we all joined in. I really enjoyed the camaraderie."

**JOHN COOK**  
VICSES Tambo Valley Unit

"A memory that stands out is that we used to go to the dragon boat races to help rescue people who fell in the water since someone had drowned once before. We'd have three or four rescue boats – one at the start and one at the finish line, with the others following the dragon boats down the track. The dragon boats were very long and thin – once you were in the water, you needed rescuing! I enjoyed going to those events."

Another fond memory I have is from community engagement events where I brought along my daughter's dog Teddy. He was a hit with the crowds and became our unit mascot at events like Moomba and the 2016 Pride March."

**DENIS BRAIN**  
VICSES Footscray Unit



Denis Brain on left at an annual camp

"It's also been great to have a shared experience of being a VICSES volunteer with my brother Robert Barns. We have around 110 years of service between us!"

**KEITH BARNES**  
VICSES Euroa Unit

**H**ow integral is VICSES to Victorian communities, and what would you say to new recruits or those looking to join VICSES?



Robert Barns

"You've got to be dedicated I think – prepared that when your pager goes off you turn out, not just sit on the couch. I've been known to be halfway through my coffee and leave to turn out straight away. I'm 4km out of the town, and I'd get to our headquarters in my pyjamas with my gear in my bag, and I'd change in the back of the vehicle on the way to the incident. If you put your overalls on at home, you won't make the truck. You need to be pretty interested in it – it's not something you can do one day and not be interested in the next day."

**ROBERT BARNES**  
VICSES Euroa Unit



Brett Neve

"Being a VICSES volunteer is very fulfilling work, and we don't necessarily get a thanks or pat on the back. Education is a huge part of being a VICSES volunteer. You will learn new skills – even the little things like knots and chainsaw safety and being aware of your surroundings (not just what's in front of you). Lots of people don't know how to do things, like turning the water meter off. You need to build resilience, and you'll learn to do things you didn't know you could."

**BRETT NEVE**  
VICSES Frankston Unit



Keith Barnes

"You need people around that want to help – pull up their sleeves and do something. We want people who want to help others and make a difference in the world. It's a pretty poor world if you can't help each other. Trees down and flooding are some of the most frequent call-outs we get Euroa. Without VICSES and our equipment, including stuff like sandbags, where would the support and response come from?"

**KEITH BARNES**  
VICSES Euroa Unit



Denis Brain leading SES contingent in Moomba parade with Teddy (dog)

**I**s there anything that you'd like to see for the future of VICSES?

"I think in small degrees we are moving into the right direction. We have better gear and equipment. This will keep getting better hopefully as technology evolves. We are better maintaining our volunteers' wellbeing and safety now, and they are valued by the community



David Fitzroy

more and more which is really nice. You see VICSES on the TV for storm damage incidents, and it's wonderful. We never had this kind of recognition. So, it's nice to see the recognition and value, I hope it continues in this direction."

**DAVID FITZROY**  
VICSES Alexandra Unit

**H**ow do you think VICSES has evolved over the last 50 years?

"Leaps and bounds from the early start of the Civil Defence days to the VICSES current incarnation. In all areas of management, training, mental health support, and general welfare of the volunteers and knowledge of what we do to make the community we serve safe."

**IAN SINCLAIR**  
VICSES Beechworth Unit

"VICSES has evolved in a much-needed way over fifty years. With government funding, up-to-date technology, modern vehicles and far superior gear and advanced training units are well equipped to handle most situations. It has been a great honor to serve as a VICSES member over a period spanning fifty years."

**CLIFF TANN**  
VICSES Colac Unit

### Messages

Interim Chief Executive Officer

Minister for Emergency Services

Emergency Management Commissioner

Chief Officer Operations

### Before VICSES

### Who we are today

### Feature

### A history of our fleet

### Our stories

### Golden Jubilee Members

### Looking back gallery



# Looking back



↑ 1996 - Search in Oaklands

2023 - Women in Rescue →

↑ 1986 - Flying fox



1991 - Mini fair demo with Heywood Unit →



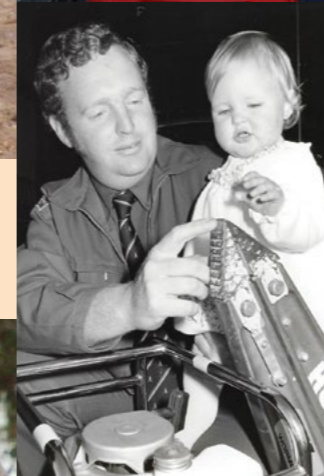
↑ 1990 - Road Crash Rescue, Oaklands Road



↓ 1975 - Warnabool vehicle



↑ 2021 - Nillumbik Unit undertakes Road Crash Rescue training during COVID-19



↑ 1980 - Jaws of Life presentation with Nhill Unit Deputy Controller Stan Hendy and daughter Carryn



↑ 1975 - Ballarat Unit vehicle

← 2009 - Providing fire support during Black Saturday



← 2018 - Alpine Search and Survival



↑ 2020 - Malvern Unit requests for assistance after a supercell storm

1992 - VICSES staff ↓



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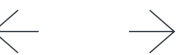
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Thank you to our  
 Co-Principal Partner AAMI  
 for supporting VICSES  
 for over 20 years and our  
 50 year celebrations.

