

LUCINDALE, SA 5272

THE BIG VISION OF A SMALL TOWN ENSURES ITS FUTURE.

STORY + PHOTOS BY GRETEL SNEATH

HOW CAN AN isolated country town of 400 people lure 22,000 people to a field day event? “Small town, big vision has been the Lucindale motto for a while,” event secretary Lyn Crosby says. “People only have to tell someone in Lucindale you can’t do it because you’re only a small town, and that’s it.”

The farming community in the heart of south-eastern South Australia doesn’t have a men’s shed; it has Yakka Park, the working den of 38 Lions who bring the South East Field Days to life every March. Jeff Davey is one of eight members who have been there since the first event 37 years ago. “We had to beg the 40 exhibitors to attend, and while crowd numbers are a bit hazy, I remember they ate seven beasts at the barbecue,” he says.

Today, 600 exhibitors from across Australia and New Zealand participate, and most of Lucindale pitches in to help. “Lucindale is a place that cares, with people who are willing to get involved and recognise others’ involvement, and that’s what makes it so successful,” says Adrian Maywald, principal of the town’s area school. One of three public schools in the state to offer boarding facilities, its strong agricultural focus includes an equine program. Many of the 185 students waited on tables at last year’s Field Days, and their efforts paid off; they accepted a \$10,000 donation from the Lucindale Lions to put towards their Canberra camp.

Lyn Crosby says the decision to return profits to the volunteers in the form of donations guarantees plenty of helpers. “It’s also the only way a town this size can support so many clubs – without the Field Days, they would raffle themselves to death,” she says.

Field Days Committee chair, John Motteram, says the \$1.75 million raised so far is the pride of Lions International. “Some clubs are twice as large as ours and only raise a fraction of what we achieve – they wonder how we do it.”

It isn’t the little town that could; it’s the little town that did. “There’s so much on and so many motivated people out there running stuff trying to better the community,” local marathon runner Brett Snodgrass says. “They like the fact that they are part of something, and this reflects the broader can-do attitude of Lucindale – they get behind everything.”

Four years ago, Brett formed the Lucindale Triathlon Club, and it now boasts 60 members. Many of them pedal up to 180 kilometres during a regular Sunday training loop along the country roads. A quarter of the town has taken out membership at the community gym, while the football and netball clubs, the Museum Historical Society and the local PA & H Society are also going strong. The Lucindale Karting Club, established in 1986, played host to the Australian titles in 2009, and the golf course at the Country Club also lures visitors, along with caravan

rallies, music festivals (the next one is at Yakka Park April 17–19), Easter campdrafts, tennis and speed shear competitions.

“We’re not on the way to anywhere, but it’s amazing how many people come through,” Lyn says.

Three years ago, grazier and artist Hamish Macdonald developed the annual exhibition Art in the Sticks to help show off his own backyard. Each October, he and his Austrian wife, Christa, open the gates to their property Cluain, turning the shearers’ quarters and banks of the dam into a unique exhibition space.

“It allows people to come and enjoy the place for what it is. I’ve exhibited as far away as Sarajevo and Vienna, but in the end I realised that I had everything I needed here, and that I was happy to be here,” Hamish says. “It’s not the end of the world; realistically, you can participate in a Sydney art show from Lucindale just as easily as if you lived in the Blue Mountains; it’s a day in the car.”

Limestone Coast Cheese Company owners Matthew and Sandra Allsopp agree that Lucindale’s relative isolation is no drawback to success, with their business approaching its 10-year anniversary. “Sandra’s family was the primary drawcard, but we were also attracted to the affordable land within the town and the milk quality – there is water down here, so the dairies are bigger and herd health is more consistent,” Matthew says.

The DiGiorgios are another family reaping the benefits of the region’s rich grazing land, planting a 126-hectare vineyard on their property Sterita Park, in addition to operating a large sheep and cattle enterprise. “It’s probably one of the most secure areas in Australia in terms of the great soils, the access to underground water, and the reliability of the seasons; it’s a very versatile place in terms of being able to grow almost anything from an agricultural or horticultural point of view,” Frank DiGiorgio says. “There are a lot of exciting things happening, which really reflects how progressive this community is.”

Jeff Davey believes the 1983 Ash Wednesday fires were the town’s real turning point when it comes to community spirit. “It really united the place, with the people who were burnt out being helped by those who were burnt the least – that was the real catalyst,” he says.

Certainly, many have moved on, with the original soldier-settler blocks consolidated into much larger holdings. Hamish recalls 13 kids waiting at the Cluain bus stop; nowadays, the school bus whizzes straight past. “That just illustrates the difference today and how bizarre it is that Lucindale has survived, but it’s due to a small group of very strong families and individuals working hard,” he says. “Most little towns are dying, but our town has stayed alive because the town has decided it wants to exist.”



CLOCKWISE: Strong community pride has earned Lucindale several state and national tidy town awards; cheesemaker Matthew Allsopp; the annual South East Field Days draw a crowd of up to 22,000 people; Lucindale’s main street, Gum Avenue; artist and grazier Hamish Macdonald.

