

You've come a long way, Koroit CWA



Koroit CWA secretary Kate Dobson, left, president Lisa Peters and publicity officer Cathy O'Brien are among a group of younger women who have revived the CWA in Koroit after an absence of more than 40 years.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] I [/dropcap]t was only a few years ago that the Country Women's Association was facing something of a crisis, with its older members dying out and few young women signing up to refresh the ranks.

But a resurgence of all-things retro, combined with a concerted recruitment drive by the CWA, has seen a revival of small branches across Victoria – including Koroit.

Koroit had been without a CWA since 1972, which is when the

last group folded after being unable to fill all the spots on its executive committee (you can imagine the mood at that particular meeting must have been sombre.)

That all changed in March last year, when a group of five, young, energised women from the Koroit area started a revitalised CWA group that reflects the traditional values of the CWA, but with a very modern twist.

“We are a lot more than just jam and scones,” says Koroit CWA President **Lisa Peters**, “although that remains a part of what we do”.



The CWA is no longer just about scones, but when the Koroit branch does make them, they are sensational...even on 40-plus degree day. (Image: Koroit CWA)

The group, which has quadrupled its membership over the past year, has moulded itself around the competing demands of life for contemporary women, including holding its monthly meetings at night so that working women, and busy mothers, are able to attend.

“It’s a supportive environment as well as being really social. You get to meet and mix with different people from all walks of life,” explains Koroit CWA Secretary **Kate Dobson**.

“If you are not into sport, or you don’t have kids at school, there are not a lot of other options for social get togethers in a rural area,” she adds.

The current mix of members includes professional women, full-time mothers, farmers, tree-changers from Melbourne, the crafty and not-so-crafty, makers, bakers, movers and shakers.

“All of our members bring different skills to the group, from professional development skills right through to practical skills,” Kate says.



Tea-towels and teacups (displayed here at Kirkstall Hall) remain a nostalgic part of the CWA, even in a time of smartphones and Facebook pages. Image: Koroit CWA.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] A [/dropcap]s to what a 21st

version of the CWA actually does, well it is perhaps best described as a hybrid of a social club, a craft club, apolitical activism, a fundraising club and a group that aims to build a sense of community by reaching out to each other.

President Lisa has experienced this sense of community first hand, having only recently moved to the area from the UK to marry her partner, Jeremy.

“Shortly after I arrived here I found out I was pregnant with twins and I had no family close by. When the twins were born, the CWA girls organised a food roster to deliver two home-cooked meals, twice a week, and that made such a difference,” Lisa explains.

One weekend may find the women running the gumboot toss at the local Koroit Agricultural Show, or skittles at the Koroit Irish Festival, or their attention may be focussed on helping to raise awareness of critical social issues, such as suicide prevention, or domestic violence.



Debbie Lenehan, left, wowed the judges at the Henty Group Creative Arts show with her mug bag that she has since taught the other Koroit CWA members how to make, including Sharon Wohlers, pictured.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] M [/dropcap]onthly meetings often include guest speakers (including an impromptu speech by *Bluestone Magazine!*), with every second meeting held as a dinner function at one of the local pubs or restaurants who are always delighted to see 20 hungry women walking in the door.

And while the Koroit CWA is very much about modern life, the traditional “cook-and-make” side of the CWA has not been forgotten. In fact shortly after reforming, the group hastily entered the Henty Group Creative Arts Exhibition and scooped a number of prizes for their preserves, baking and an innovative cup bag created by member **Debbie Lenehan** using a pattern from the internet.

“We had a scone-making fundraiser at the Kirkstall pub in February on what turned out to be one of the hottest days of the year. It was almost unbearable, but we made the scones and people still turned up to eat them, so people still love that side of the CWA,” Kate says with a laugh.

[box] **The Koroit CWA recently won ‘Most Progressive Group’ for its region. It will hold its next monthly meeting (a dinner meeting) at the Kirkstall Hotel on June 18 at 7.30pm. Interested women are welcome to come along. You can also contact them via koroitcwa@hotmail.com, on [Facebook](#) or 0408 399 144 (Kate).**[/box]

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