

LISTEN UP MEDIA!

THIS IS OUR STORY AND WE WANT YOU TO SHARE IT!

Big things can happen in little towns. The story of Neerim South.

The Monash Freeway (M1) is the link between Gippsland & Melbourne. Turning off the M1 at Warragul you enter a countryside that is unaffected by the bustling growth corridor, 19 km from the highway you'll find the little known township of Neerim South with a population of just 600 residents. The countryside is speckled with quaint country cottages & lush green rolling hills that immediately give you a sense of peace and tranquillity.

But then there's something you may not expect to come across in a rural area.

Just a month ago the entrance to Neerim South was one you might have missed with just a small wooden welcome sign and a view of the Tarago Valley. Today the view is framed with the very blue Neerim Bower Small Town Transformation sculpture - soaring 7 storeys high it provides a gateway to the township, Mt Baw Baw Alpine Resort and the Great Dividing Range beyond. The significance of this sculpture is unsurpassed, due to the dedication of a group of residents who grasped an opportunity to transform Neerim South using Art. Neerim South was a through-town with passers-by rarely stopping except to grab a few rations and petrol on their way. What was then, is now a thing of the past.

The Neerim District Progress Association Inc. (NDPA) applied for a \$350,000 Small Town Transformations grant administered for the Victorian Government by Regional Arts Victoria and jumped at the opportunity to leverage off the local artists creative talent and extensive local construction expertise. Neerim South was one of five successful small towns to receive the grant in May 2013.

The past 16 months has seen this town transformed and confidently looking to the future. Some of the grant funding was used to create a substantial gateway at the southern entrance to the township symbolising the bower of the indigenous Satin Bower Bird. Incorporating the beautiful and unique natural aspects of the area and creating relevance of this to art is no mean feat, designed by local artists Christine Cochran, Keith Graham and Phil Henshall and constructed using local skills in local businesses.

The past year has seen local artists funded to teach in local schools and subsidised Art workshops funding local artists to tutor over 80 people in various arts and crafts.

The local community has provided incredible support. The Neerim District Community Bank sponsored the Neerim District Community Bank Art Prize – Neerim Bower Acquisition, that will see 20 sculptures displayed throughout the town from the 18th October to the 9th November and may purchase \$10,000 worth of sculpture to be installed in the township.

The NDPA has in 16 months, turned the \$350,000 grant into over \$650,000 of benefit to the local economy and community.

This grant has not been the only achievement of the NDPA. The last 8 years has seen them work to obtain \$850,000 for the (now completed) Neerim South Wetlands that are already showing social and health benefits and will drought proof local sports fields.

So this past year has seen the NDPA gain over \$1.5 Million in funding that has provided social & economic benefit to the district. The winners not only being local businesses and residents, but visitors who can now enjoy an interesting and rewarding break in this thriving district.

October is the time to visit to Neerim South.

October marks the launch of the many hours of dedicated work of artists and residents, with the inaugural Neerim Arts Festival being held on Sunday 26th October as part of the Neerim Bower: Inspired by Birds Small Town Transformation launch event.

A sculpture exhibition on the theme 'Inspired by Birds' will be on display within the township from October 18 – November 9. The sculptures are for sale and one or more pieces will be acquired to develop a collection of public art, for permanent installation in the township.

The Serigraph Gallery will have an exhibition of works from abstract to the more traditional – local artists have created captivating interpretations of the 'Inspired by Birds' theme which will be on view at the gallery throughout the month of October.

Local garden scheme, Gardivalia, is held on the weekends between the 5th & 25th of October and features open gardens, garden tours, workshops & demonstrations. The delicious array of local produce will also be showcased – with galleries, restaurants and wineries to delight you with their fare.

Visit Neerim South for the weekend but be sure to make it to the Neerim Bower Arts Festival – with art displays, food, wine, and music held on the 26th October, it's sure to be a memorable trip.

Regional Arts Victoria presents Small Town Transformations on behalf of the Victorian Government.

For details visit www.neerimbower.com.au



Information for the editor:

Following an intensive application and shortlisting process, Neerim South is one of five towns to receive \$350,000 *Small Town Transformations* funding administered by Regional Arts Victoria on behalf of the Victorian Government, for a significant artistic project with a lasting legacy.

The funding has enabled people of all ages within the community to take part in a broad range of arts projects on the theme 'Inspired by Birds'. These include Artist in Residence School Projects, Community Workshops, a major Acquisitive Art Prize, and Community Art Prizes. Some of the art acquired through all these projects will be used to enhance the town and district and attract visitors.

These initiatives strive to grow community and stimulate economic growth within the town and surrounding areas.

"Mating rituals of the Satin Bower Bird were the inspiration for designing the Neerim Bower and the "Inspired by Birds" concept, developed by artists Phil Henshall, Christine Cochran and Keith Graham, with the Neerim District Progress Association. The Neerim Bower, located at the southern end of Neerim South, West Gippsland, will be an entrance to the Neerim District."

For more information visit: <http://neerimbower.com.au/> and [facebook.com/neerimbower](https://www.facebook.com/neerimbower)

FOR ALL MEDIA ENQUIRIES CONTACT:

Kadri Kutt – Marketing & Publicity

The Creative Bunch

E: kadri@thecreativebunch.com.au

M: 0409 000 040

FOR ALL PROJECT ENQUIRIES CONTACT:

Mark Long - Neerim Bower Project Coordinator.

Neerim District Progress Association Inc.

neerimbower@gmail.com

M: 0411 199 199