

Evergreen musician's milestone

COMMUNITY

BY LUCY WILLIAMS

RETIRED police officer and keen musician Ivan Whyte recently celebrated his 90th birthday, including his mammoth 27-year contribution to the local Evergreen Band.

Shepparton-born and bred, Ivan came to Bendigo in 1958 and has spent a large part of his adult life in the region and he feels no different at 90.

"It's no different to 70," he said of his recent milestone. "Evergreen Band keeps me going."

Ivan continued a lifelong hobby of music when he joined the Evergreens in 1995. The band had only formed that January and Ivan has remained with the band to this day. He is the longest serving member of this very active group of retired musicians, with an average age of 76.

"I just saw them playing in the mall in the old rotunda and asked them who they were," Ivan explained. And the rest is history.

The Evergreens entertain residents in Bendigo nursing homes and retirement villages, and produce 25 to 30 in-house concerts in a normal year on top of weekly rehearsals in the Eaglehawk Band Room.

Ivan's partner of three years, Margaret Rennie, says his life is music.

"Ivan's day is TV and the radio music until late," she said.

"His whole life revolves around music and he's got quite a few different instruments. And he was music soulmates with his first wife of 52 years - Sylvie - and he has her piano here."

Ivan said he was also in a three-piece band with his late wife Sylvie - who was a widow and mother of three to Patricia, Donald and Pamela - when she met him. Through his three step-children Ivan has five grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. Ivan himself had three older brothers but in many ways was more of an only child.

"War played a big bearing on the family," he said. "My father, Charles, served in WWI and he died from pneumonia at 53 (from wartime gas exposure) when I was very young.



MUSIC: Retired policeman Ivan Whyte celebrates 90 years, including 27 as a member of local Evergreen Band for retired musicians. **Picture:** NONI HYETT

"In WWII, my three brothers were away so it was only mum, Elizabeth, and I through the war years."

When Ivan was younger, if you couldn't find him tapping out a tune, you could track him down running laps of his neighborhood. In his working life, Ivan was a police officer and was first posted in Bendigo in 1963 following his training in Melbourne. After several different positions, Ivan settled in as a Sergeant at Eaglehawk police station in 1982, where he continued to serve until his retirement in 1989.

The now 90-year-old also took the opportunity to play music in the police band while in Melbourne, pursuing a passion he had developed after learning the violin at age 15.

"I learned the violin for a couple of years, much to the neighbours' dismay," he said.

"They weren't too keen when I started practising - squeaks and squawks."

On joining the police band, the musician then learnt to play the cornet for four or five years.

He also later taught himself to play the clarinet, saxophone, trombone and trumpet in his "idle" moments.

Ivan had the opportunity to perform at Government House in Melbourne a number of times with the police band - for balls, dignitaries and for the Red Cross - as well as travelling around the state for functions including the Bendigo Easter Parade.

And this love of performing continues to this day with the Evergreens.

Ivan has also received letters from politicians Lisa Chesters, Jacinta Allan, Premier Daniel Andrews and now former Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Margaret believes he could get one from the Queen at 100 if he keeps going the way he is - active as ever with the band, his beloved music and his energetic dog, Spot.

Any retired brass musicians or percussionists are invited to shake off their cobwebs and join Ivan and the band to take music to those less able to travel from home.

Contact president@evergreenband.org.au for more information.