

transport businesses and a few other passive businesses.

It also has a beautiful modern sport complex.

But the school and that one all-embracing shop make up defined centre of Maiden Gully.

The "separate-ness" of Maiden Gully from Bendigo surprised Leon and Kim Holt when they bought the town's major business in January.

Leon said he originally was from Eaglehawk (just a few kilometres back down the road) but had spent three years in Townsville before coming back.

He had expected Maiden Gully to be a sort of off-shoot of his home town and was intrigued to find that was not so.

"I've always liked this area. It's a good, peaceful community, a huge area when you look at it, but I didn't really expect it to have such a sense of community.

"That's been great."

The business, he said, nearly flooded him in the first month; the 12 to 16-hour days seven days a week were a shock to someone who had been in engineering.

"But we survived that and now it's fine."

Leon and Kim's postal agency serves a population of about 300, but they believe the true population of Maiden Gully to be much more than that.

It stretches all the way from the West Bendigo stadium to the edges of Marong.

Kim is a Maiden Gully convert, praising the area, the views, the people and the school.

"This feels like home. That's the only way I can put it.

"Townsville never felt like home.

"It felt like something in between doing other things with your life."

**O**UTSIDE their store, Lyn Pearce and Lorna Wilkinson were chatting in the mild sun-

shine. Both were ardent supporters of their hometown.

Lyn and her family moved from Kangaroo Flat in the 1980s, and found that in travelling time, they were no further from the centre of Bendigo.

"I like the land. I like the space of Maiden Gully."

In Kangaroo Flat, they had lived on a suburban-sized block.

Lyn has connections to trendy, pre-growth Maiden Gully.

Her grandfather owned farming land in the centre of the town and built his life there.

Her father was born in Maiden Gully.

The older residents say the change has not been without its cost.

"My mum says she doesn't know anyone in Maiden Gully anymore.

"To some degree having a family connection influenced our decision to move here, but I think I would've anyway."

Lorna Wilkinson said the town had worked its magic for her too: "I don't want to move."

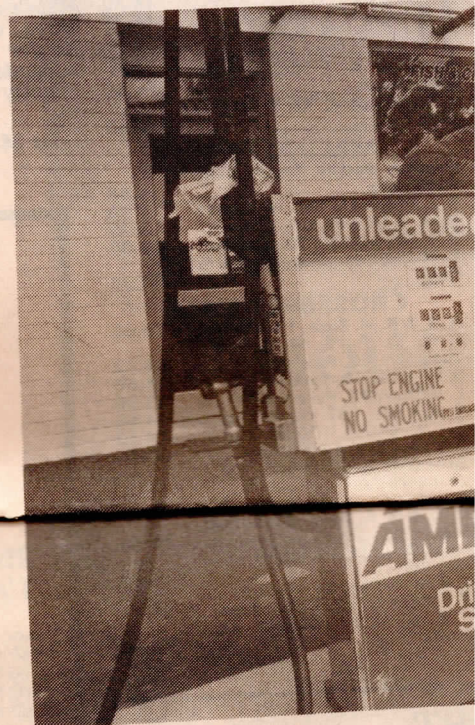
**G**ERARD and Carol Kelly fell in love with their wonderful stone cottage restaurant seven years ago without knowing much about Maiden Gully, but have been delighted how the area grew.

The restaurant, probably the oldest surviving building in Maiden Gully, sits happily on the banks of the Myers Creek, now surrounded by the newest Colorbond-roofed ranch houses.

Gerard had come to Bendigo to undergo new technology training for his Telecom job and Carol who had had many years as a professional cook.

"Carol answered an ad for a cook and we came out, walked in and knew we wanted to buy it," Gerard said.

"It was as though the building said to me: where have you



been? I've been waiting for you." Contrary to popular belief, the restaurant is not named after Irish potatoes, but after a former owner, Peter "Pratty" Monsanto.

"It's pratty as in prattle on, and it's nice that people do that here; they make an occasion of it and just prattle away the night."

Pratty's Patch is undergoing a major and costly extension, using the considerable stonemason skills of Bendigo artisan Peter Male, whose work precisely matches the style and skill of the original builders. The restaurant is about to adopt a tavern-style liquor licence.

Do they ever get jealous of opening their stone cottage to so many strangers?

"No, never," Carol declares.

"I feel exactly the opposite: it would be selfish to keep it to ourselves."