

It is east of the four-lane Calder Highway, winding in and out of trees, up and down impossible slopes, and diving through creek beds.

The name Ravenswood carries great prestige in the motorcycle community.

Across the four-lanes is the recently rebuilt Ravenswood pub, or, to be precise, the Junction Hotel, named for the nearby junction of the Calder and the Calder Alternate road through Lockwood.

For the past eight months it has been run by Stewart and Debbie Crowther.



gone well so far.

Both were in sales management in Bendigo before taking over the "Ravo".

They were attracted by the different nature of the pretty little country pub — a clean, cheery, airy building designed for families.

IT WAS a million miles away from the cut-throat competitiveness of the Bendigo hotel industry, in a growing community, with good highway trade.

For 121 years, it and its predecessors' prominent spot on the Melbourne-Mildura route made it a convenient meals and rest stop for drivers and families.

"I couldn't believe what we saw when we first came into it," Stewart said. "There was a big sign up there in the lounge, saying: All children must remain seated at all times."

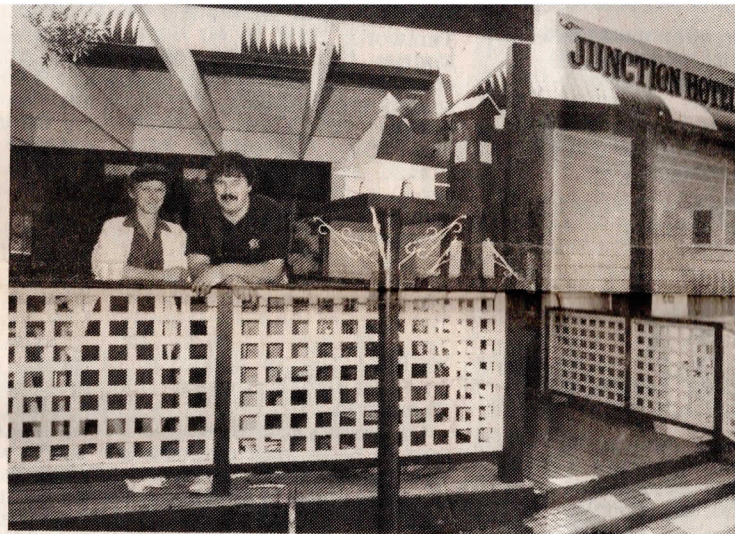
Parents of two little tackers themselves, Stewart and Debbie quickly ripped it down and installed a children's play area and a child escape-proof garden setting.

They said they could not imagine how publicans expected young children to remain seated after having been strapped into a car seat for perhaps six or eight hours.

As well as travellers, the Crowthers say they have been blessed with a loyal local patronage.

"It's been an exciting experience for us."

As most residents of Ravenswood will tell you, one



● ABOVE: Debbie and Stewart Crowther on the patio of their charming Ravenswood pub.

problem with the community is that the nearest general store or milk bar is eight kilometres away.

While the Crowthers have tried to meet that need by supplying take-away food from the hotel, the broader need could be met in the near future.

The hotel freehold is owned by an oil company, which also owns the land next door, and has plans to establish a fairly prominent petrol and convenience store on it.

There is no time frame for the new businesses but locals believe it will be a great breakthrough.

The town has been without a

store and petrol station since old Black Stump service station was demolished to make way for Calder Highway upgrading.

"A lot has gone from here the years," Stewart says.

"They pulled down the service station, the railway station, school, the church."

But there is a sense that the town has turned.

People are building their homes on Ravenswood land now, the store and petrol outlet would be the place on.

The community which spawned a gold rush is now sharing some of the growth.