

Family Fun Fair in 79th year

The Bendigo YWCA annual family fun fair in Rosalind Park will be held Saturday, November 16.

Amusements, cake, craft and plant stalls, fire engine, horse and buggy rides and a surprise visit by some VFL footballers should attract a number of people to the fair.

The Bendigo Zonta Club will help the YWCA with its fundraising efforts by holding a ceramics exhibition at the RSL Hall.

YWCA public relations officer, Ms Jill Tobias, said potters from around Victoria have entered work for the exhibition.

Two major prizes will be awarded by Canberra School of Art head of ceramics, Mr Alan Watt.

Ms Tobias said the fair was an ideal opportunity to do some early Christmas shopping.

She said money from the fair would fund YWCA programs.

"The Bendigo YWCA is very proud of its history as an innovative provider of programs for women," she said.

Ms Tobias said the YWCA was established in Bendigo 1906 and had been moving with the changing social climate ever since.

She said the YWCA started at 6 Medical Terrace in Myers St, now the Coles New World car park.

From research being carried out for a thesis by Lisa Hay with the assistance of former president, Mavis Carne it has been established that a board of management was formed with Mrs Langley as president, Miss Owen as secretary and Miss Lyett as treasurer.

Rooms were furnished for writing letters, meeting other young women and as an employment bureau for girls.

In 1911 a "thrift club" was started.

It was a service designed to encourage young women to save a small amount each week, collected and banked in their names by volunteers.

This thrift club collection continued until as recently as 1981.

By 1919 work at the YWCA had extended and club rooms were opened in a suite of rooms above the business premises of Moran and Cato's in Hargreaves St.

Ms Tobias said a fascinating detail to come to light was that in 1925 the YWCA organised a series of five "sex education lectures" an almost unheard of and forward thinking thing to do back then, but typical of much of the group's work.

She said the lectures were given in the Temperance Hall in View St by Dr Gwyneth Buchanan and Dr Constance Ellis with lantern slides and illustrations.

In 1926, 22 Swiss girls arrived in Bendigo to work in the new Hanro Knitting Mills, in Hargreaves St.

They were met at the railway station by members of the YWCA and later welcomed to the YWCA hostel in Howard Place, where they resided and were helped to speak English.

Ms Tobias said the Swiss girls came to Bendigo to instruct local girls and women in the use of the machines especially imported from Switzerland.

She said hostel accommodation was provided for young girls for many years by the YWCA.

It started in 1919 when the delicensed

"Black Swan" was converted into a hostel.

This continued until 1958 when the former blind home in Inglewood Rd was bought and used as a hostel until 1960.

Ms Tobias said the YWCA building on the corner of High and Short streets was bought in 1961 and operated as a youth centre until 1981.

The YWCA presently operates from premises at 465 Hargreaves St where it offers a wide range of classes and activities, as well as having rooms available to rent to other clubs and groups.

Ms Tobias said a large part of the YWCA's service to the community has been in the form of organised sporting activities.

A basketball (later netball) association was formed in 1926 and continued for many years.

The YWCA's Hockey Association has enjoyed successful seasons for many years and another milestone was reached in 1969 when the Women's International Rules Basketball was sponsored in Bendigo by the YWCA.

The YWCA has also been involved with a mother-child playgroup and home tutor scheme for migrant women.

Next year will be the 80th anniversary of the YWCA in Bendigo.

Ms Tobias said the group was trying to provide special programs with match the changing community needs.

The future of these programs will depend on the success of the fair.

YWCA co-ordinator Mrs Judyth Jones said she was keen to hear from people wishing to join the association.