

THIS LITTLE PIG WENT TO MARKET

HISTORY

Dandy Bacon's neon pig in top hat and tails welcomed generations of visitors and residents to the city. On Friday the animated icon received its own welcome home.

More than 30 people turned out at 7am on a damp and overcast morning to see the famous sign again light up the central Dandenong sky, facing Lonsdale Street from atop the Dandenong Market.

Mayor Angela Long told the crowd she had clear memories of one of the first animated signs in the region.

"Knowing we were almost home whenever we passed the pig, and he always seemed to be tipping his hat to welcome us home," she said.

"The Dandy pig will now be part of Dandenong's bright future for many years to come."

Glen Binstead worked at the company known affectionately as Dandy Bacon for 23 years. He and wife Jan rose at 4.45am to drive up from Gembrook for the opening.

"The pig was always an icon as you drove

Workers

reunited: Former Gippsland Bacon Curing Company employees Ron McNamara, Bernie Bridle, Ron Chivers and John Roberts with their old social club banner.

(CASEY NEILL)



into Dandenong," Mrs Binstead said.

"For everyone from the Gippsland side, the pig was a real icon."

The sign was erected in the 1950s on Lonsdale Street, welcoming the traffic that crossed Forster Street from Gippsland, and was taken down after the factory closed in 1983.

Former Dandenong councillor Ian McDonald moved a motion to bring back the pig at a 1982 council meeting but couldn't even attract a seconder.

He was thrilled to see it back in action following restoration by the current City of Greater Dandenong.

Engine driver Ron McNamara worked at the factory for five years, until its closure in the 1980s. He drove from Bairnsdale to Cranbourne to stay with family overnight to ensure he was present for the event.

Maria Mastroianni's father had a farm in Nar Nar Goon and she accompanied him on many trips to Dandenong Market with his cows.

"When we saw the pig we thought 'we've arrived'," he said.

"I'm very happy to see it back."

CASEY NEILL

MEMORIES OF ICON

Dandenong and District Historical Society president Chris Keys writes about her family's connection to the pig sign.

relationship.

Doug Keys started when he was 18, during the Depression and retired as company secretary some 40 years later.

My mum, Thelma Keys (nee Rendell), started at the Gippsland Bacon Curing Company - affectionately called Dandy Bacon - in 1937, aged 16.

She worked from 8.30am till 5pm, five days a week. Thelma rode her bike from Perry Road, Keysborough, every day. She also had to ride from the factory on Cheltenham Road into the post office each night after work hours to post the mail, and then ride back to Keysborough.

Doug Keys's desk was opposite and all office workers ate their lunch, brought in from home, at their desk. Thelma use to throw Doug an orange and say "If you peel it you can have half". That was the beginning of their

Thelma continued to be promoted and eventually was the switchboard operator and receptionist. She handled sexual harassment by threatening the person with the 'pig stabber'.

In 1941 the couple married while Doug was on leave from the AIF, after returning from the Middle East. Thelma left the factory pending the arrival of their son Peter in 1942, never to return to the workforce. I arrived in 1949.

As a child growing up in Dandenong I remember the whole town knew the factory whistle that sounded at noon each day, indicating lunch time. Later I remember seeing the Dandy Bacon sign up near the corner of Foster and Lonsdale streets, and thinking we are nearly home.