

# Migrants' past has rosy future

ONE of Springvale's most important multicultural sites has been commemorated, with the opening of the long-planned Enterprise Hostel rose and sculpture garden.

Although the former migrant hostel in West-all Road, Springvale, is now a retirement village, its past as a welcoming point for migrants to the suburb will not be forgotten.

The garden features more than 200 roses and, at its centre, a three-metre glass rose petal.

The hostel was built more than 40 years ago to accommodate up to 1000 refugees and migrants at any one time. The mayor of the then Springvale Council told hostel residents: "You are welcome. Become part of this community but retain your culture and your language. Build your places of worship. Form your own social clubs."

Garden project convener Merle Mitchell said this was the basis for the harmonious community that was established and whose "legacy continues to this day".

The Spirit of Enterprise Project, led by members of the Springvale community, has been described as having national significance, with several leading Australians formally endorsing the project.



**In bloom:** Many people turned out to enjoy the official opening of the Enterprise Hostel rose and sculpture garden.

Former prime minister Malcolm Fraser said the project "clearly shows what happens when new migrants are welcomed with open arms and brought in to the community. It adds to the diversity".

Councillors Roz Blades and Matthew Kirwan, who attended the opening, agreed the project and finished garden were wonderful acknowledgments of the hostel's role in Springvale's past.

# Enterprise Trail's new mark

By CASEY NEILL

CENTRELINK in Springvale has played an important role in many migrant journeys.

City of Greater Dandenong mayor Sean O'Reilly on Wednesday 26 August launched a marker recognising this contribution, part of The Enterprise Trail.

It evolved from the Spirit of Enterprise Project, which began with a small group in 2008 recording the Enterprise Migrant Hostel's history.

The Enterprise Trail starts at the Tribute Garden at the old Enterprise site, now Lexington Gardens Retirement Village.

Centrelink is second on the trail. The Springvale social security office worked closely with community organisations to make sure people had good access to their entitlements.

Cr O'Reilly said the trail would help visitors to Springvale understand where the community has come from.

"Recording the history of this project shows that a positive pro-active response to change can be ground-breaking," he said.

There'll also be markers at Springvale Rise Primary School, where the Multicultural Teacher's Aide program started; the Community Health Centre, Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau (SCAAB); Springvale Neighbourhood House, which was built to provide a space for cultural groups to meet; and Springvale Road Shopping Centre, which has always reflected the ever-changing population.

The final one will be at the redeveloped Springvale civic



**Federal Human Services Minister Marise Payne with Merle Mitchell.** 143177  
Picture: GARY SISSONS

precinct on Springvale Road.

Cr O'Reilly said a group would walk the trail from start to finish once the final marker was in place.

He said the event would "celebrate the success which

comes from welcoming newcomers, supporting cultural difference, finding different ways to deliver services, all of which have led to the wonderful harmonious community in which we live".

# Interpretive sign

## LAUNCH AT SPRINGVALE

18  
May  
2016  
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The latest chapter in Springvale's Enterprise Trail story has been told with the launch of the Springvale Neighbourhood House interpretive sign.

The Enterprise Trail evolved out of a project that began when a small group of interested community members started recording the history of the Enterprise Migrant Hostel in Springvale.

With community asking for more ongoing tangible expressions of the stories, a decision was then made to establish a 'trail' of significant sites showcasing their importance to the residents, migrants and refugees who had settled in the area.

Built in 1984, the Springvale Neighbourhood House is one of these sites as it established itself as a safe and supportive meeting place for a growing and culturally-diverse community.

Today it continues to play a key role in the community by providing services, support

and connections for individuals, newly-arrived migrants and a diverse range of cultural groups. It plays a vital role in the community and is part of an extensive and unique network of settlement and support services in Springvale.

Within the building is a unique 'tree trunk' that symbolises growth, protection and the Australian landscape. It was harvested from the property of a local Councillor by the young people who were involved in the construction of the House.

The Enterprise Trail begins at the Tribute Garden at the old Enterprise site which is now the Lexington Gardens Retirement Village. Telling the important stories of people and place, markers on the 'trail' will eventually incorporate: Springvale Rise Primary School, Centrelink, Springvale Community Health Centre, Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau, Springvale Road Shopping Centre, and the re-developed Springvale Civic Centre.



MP Clare O'Neal and Mayor Heang Tak with former residents of the Enterprise Migrant Hostel



Thu Huynh and Maria Villarroel remember living at the Enterprise Migrant Hostel. N450S110

# Enterprising tales return

**Rebecca David**

ESCAPING conflict and hardship, they came in their thousands from 58 countries bringing a mix of cultural traditions and exotic cuisines to Springvale.

Early this year, their tales were told through an exhibition at Melbourne's Immigration Museum – a collection of artefacts lovingly compiled by a group of local volunteers over two years.

Now, the story of the Enterprise Migrant Hostel has returned to its rightful home for a limited time.

Clothes, toys, documents and other items that reflect the hostel's 22-year history will be on display at the Springvale Heritage Centre until the end of June.

Organising committee member Merle Mitchell said there were lessons to be learnt amid the old items.

"While life at Enterprise was never perfect the storytellers all reflect on the support they got from one another while living together at Enterprise," Ms Mitchell said.

"They contrast this with the isolation of people who are placed in private flats on their arrival today, many residents talk of the lasting friendships they made."

Organisers have been able to reunite former residents and workers who had lost touch.

The exhibition will be at the Springvale Heritage Centre, behind the library, until the end of June, 1-4pm or by appointment for schools.

# Hostel history on-line

By Michael Randall

A WEBSITE dedicated to the history of a Springvale migrant hostel will be launched tomorrow night at the Lexington Gardens Retirement Village, site of the former Enterprise Hostel.

Victorian Multicultural Commission chief executive officer George Lekakis will be in charge of the site.

The website, which is now up and running, is a product of the recent exhibition — featured in *The Journal* in May last year — at Springvale Heritage Centre, that documented the hostel's history.

Project co-ordinator Merle Mitchell said website designer Sandy Kouroupidis would also be at the launch.

“This will be a wonderful opportunity for people to once again renew old friendships and for many to visit the place where they were first welcomed to Australia.”

Ms Mitchell said the website was still a work in progress.

“If... we have missed anything or if you have found any photos or other information which you



**Many friends:** Ruth Gonzalez and Teresa Piancatelli, who lived and worked at the hostel, are pictured at the exhibition last year with one of the uniforms they used to wear.

**Picture:** Ted Kloszynski

would like us to include please contact us.” She said work was still being undertaken on a submission for funding to help develop ideas about a permanent

memorial to the hostel in Springvale.

**Further details:** Merle Mitchell: 95584163.

# ENTERPRISE HOSTEL

Newsletter November 2007

As the end of 2007 approaches we thought that it was important to bring you up to date with the work of the organising group for the 2008 Enterprise Exhibition at the Melbourne Immigration Museum. We have been working hard researching facts, interviewing people and collecting memorabilia, since the last newsletter was produced. We are very grateful for all the time and assistance so many people have given us.

We've now reached the stage where we have a better idea about how we will group all the information we have been collecting. These will come under the following headings:

- Why Enterprise was established, why it was given the name Enterprise, the official opening
- Who was responsible for running Enterprise
- People's impressions when they first arrived
- The memories of people who were children when they first arrived
- Daily life at Enterprise
- The unaccompanied minors - children who came without their parents
- Food
- How the community welcomed the residents
- Health Services at Enterprise
- Welfare services
- The practical assistance that was given and how it was organised – eg clothing, CALFRIC loans etc
- The times when Enterprise was a detention centre
- The shop, the bank, Commonwealth Employment Service, Social Security etc
- Activities in the recreation hall
- Education, including Adult Migrant English Service
- The challenges people faced

Do you have any memories which we could include under these headings? You may think your memories are unimportant but it is all the small memories which are painting the big picture of life at Enterprise eg memories of children turning the seeds from the wattle trees into games, children playing hide and seek around the stair cases, wearing a yellow uniform when working in the dining room and a purple one when working in the kitchen, tying a cotton to the coins needed for the washing machine so they could be retrieved when the washing was finished! We need the stories of when 'things went wrong' as well as the stories of 'the good times'.

So please jot down even your smallest memories and send them to [merleric@netspace.net.au](mailto:merleric@netspace.net.au) or mail to 52 Gray Street, Springvale 3171

## Can you help us find any of these people?

There are some groups of people who were residents at Enterprise and who we have not made contact with yet so we need your help to locate them. These groups include:

- The nurses, particularly those who came from Fairfield to the medical health checks
- Social Security and Commonwealth Employment Service staff
- Shop keepers

- People who were detained at Enterprise, sent back to their country of origin and then returned to Australia
- People who were involved in the protests to stop people being sent back to their country of origin
- People who came as children without their parents – unaccompanied minors
- People from Turkey, Eastern Europe, the former Yugoslavia who lived at Enterprise. We have no stories from these communities. And of course we still need as many stories as possible from other community groups.
- People who were part of the migrant host scheme run by the Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau
- People who can remember walking up to the Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau on Fridays with Sherron Dunbar for information sessions
- People who can remember leaving their children at the child care centre
- The Welfare workers from the Immigration Department

### **Memorabilia**

We are also collecting lots of memorabilia but we need much more. Can you let us know what you have? You do not need to give them to us until closer to the date but we do need to know what might be available for all the display cabinets.

People have kept many interesting things from their time at Enterprise. At the moment we have or have been promised:

A Christmas Day menu, the clothes someone was given on the day she arrived at Enterprise, crockery and cups taken from the dining room, 'interpreter required' badges, registration forms, frypans and many other items.

But we need many more if we are to fill the large glass cabinets we have been given for the exhibition. We can guarantee the safety of anything you offer us. The glass cabinets are locked and we will return anything you lend us for the exhibition. So please do search your cupboards and see if you have anything that will make this exhibition one of the best ever.

We have many photos but they are mostly of people. We need photos of the dining room, inside the units, the recreation centre, the child care centre – anything which shows the physical aspects of the building.

And we are hoping that someone has copies of the bi-lingual information manuals which were used in the information sessions.

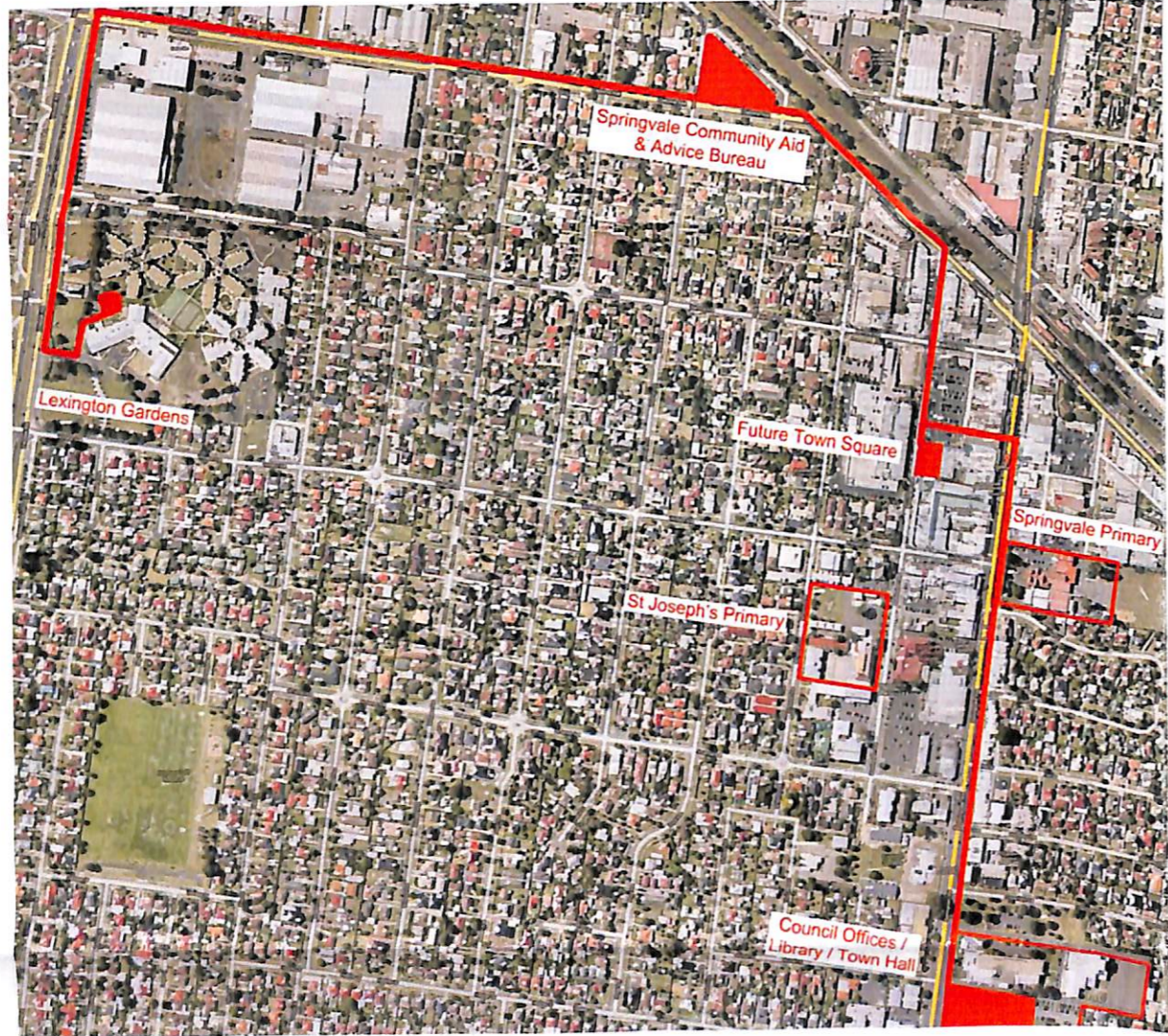
The Dandenong Historical Society has copies of all the Dandenong Journals ever printed during the years when Enterprise was operating. We are going through these to get articles written about Enterprise. It is a huge task and we would welcome any volunteers who could come and help us.

Finally we are planning a very exciting and different launch for the exhibition – more details about that in our next newsletter when we hope the arrangements will be finalised.

For any further information or offers of help please e-mail: [merleric@netspace.net.au](mailto:merleric@netspace.net.au) or ring 9558 4163



## Honouring the Enterprise: Vision Statement Summary



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### Stage 1: Enterprise, THE 'MEMORIAL'

*"Very important to have something at Lexington .... It was my birth place in Australia."*

Despite limited public access and ability to capture the broader community, it is important to respect and reaffirm people's strong ties to their beginnings in Australia.

Stage 1 focuses on the immediate aim of honouring the Enterprise Hostel at Lexington Gardens.

### Stage 2: Enterprise, THE ROSE

*"Roses are so beautiful, the first thing we see when we come to hostel - hostel open the door for us, thank you Australia."*

The impact of the original rose garden has been a powerful memory. Stage 2 will investigate the viability of propagating the 'Enterprise Rose'.

Strategic marketing of the rose can play a key role in sharing the Enterprise story with the broader community and meeting the project's broader social goals.

The Enterprise Rose can influence the nature of the memorial at Lexington Gardens and establish physical and symbolic links with Stages 3 & 4.

### Stage 3: Enterprise, THE PLACE

*"A statue is not sufficient, it has to be a place ... A central area where the public descends upon."*

*"Enterprise was about the services ... all the information to know how to live as Australians."*

Stage 3 can investigate a number of sites to develop a fabric of honour with a consistent theme throughout Springvale.

Stage 3 can remember the Enterprise in a plaza/garden associated with the new library, and inform the new library itself for an iconic signature development. This would provide a profound contribution to the community commensurate with the profound contribution made by Enterprise - A living and on going memorial entrenched in daily life.

### Stage 4: Enterprise, THE STORY

*"Got to have the story - there's no other way of telling the story."*

Stage 4 is a community event that symbolically links the memorial at Lexington Gardens with the new plaza/garden and other 'honours' along the way. Walking the roses remembers a route taken by residents to service providers in Springvale.

Publicising the walk disseminates a positive story about the value of immigration and assisting refugees, and celebrates the diversity of Springvale.

People will be invited to contribute to a memory box to bring closure to the historic part of the Enterprise experience and secure great meaning in the plaza/garden into the future through the telling of the story.



## GIVE US A HAND

# Different days for migrants

By CAM LUCADOU-WELLS

TIMES were so different when 30,000 migrants found refuge in Springvale's Enterprise Migrant Hostel, says its champion Merle Mitchell.

When the hostel was open between 1970-1992, there was a welcoming and bipartisan attitude and policies of successive governments, she says.

"Malcolm Fraser's government said we have to do something about refugee camps in Malaysia and Hong Kong. In one year we took in 15,000 refugees - and the sky didn't fall in.

"Those people were made welcome."

Ms Mitchell said in providing a service, you had to look behind the problem and find the cause. Then you can set a policy to improve things, she argues.

More people, including refugee agencies, needed to speak out against more recent government policy, she says.

"I think it's absolutely vital that agencies keep bringing to the fore that the difficulties they are facing are not created by the people they're helping.

"It's been created by the government policies put in place. So in a way the community has to take some responsibility that we've allowed governments to do that over the years."

Ms Mitchell has been part of the



Merle Mitchell and Isabel Stix at the former Enterprise site. 126005

Enterprise since the start and she continues to promote the hostel's salutary story as convener of a wide-spanning history project.

She says many residents and leaders in Springvale were instantly welcoming to new arrivals.

Springvale mayor Andrew Erikson

told new arrivals they were part of this community and to "keep your language, keep your social clubs and keep your places of worship".

From that wellspring, the voluntary Springvale Community Aid and Advice Service - of which Ms Mitchell was a director - a migrant host scheme

and the nation's first interpreter service were forged.

Greater Dandenong has since flourished into one of Australia's most multicultural communities.

"It made us the interesting place and vibrant community that we are. Someone said to me I just have to sit

down in the street in Springvale and I'm surrounded by the world."

Isabel Stix has been a proud 'mother' to many hundreds of orphan refugees at the Enterprise in the 1980s.

She recently moved back to the site, now occupied by Lexington Gardens aged care home.

"It's like I've put my roots back into the ground."

She still keeps in touch with her 'children', many of whom have formed their own families around Springvale. But when they first arrived they had nothing but the clothes on their backs and knew no-one.

Ms Stix said it was a struggle at times looking after up to 15 children "who had no families, care or love".

"It's a nice thing to see someone come with nothing then they do their studies and work and they have their own families. They are very happy."

She looks back to the days of the Enterprise as the "greatest time" and wonders how Australia could employ a "shocking" regime against asylum seekers.

"I wish they could continue the Enterprise, that sort of support for people coming here. You have to teach them about starting anew in a new culture

"If you put them in one house by themselves, it's a disaster."

Picture: GARY SISSONS

## GREATER DANDENONG'S TOP AUSSIES

# First for fame

By **CASEY NEILL**

SPRINGVALE stalwart Merle Mitchell is the first person to receive a Greater Dandenong Community Hall of Fame Award.

Councillors selected her for the Australia Day honour which is designed to recognise a community member who has shown outstanding and sustained involvement in community life.

Merle was born in Dandenong in 1934 and has lived in the municipality for most of her life.

She trained as a kindergarten teacher and settled in the developing Sandown Park area in 1961.

Limited services prompted Merle to become an active lobbyist. She helped to plan kindergarten facilities across the City of Springvale and establish Sandown Park Primary School.

Merle was a steering committee member for the Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau (SCAAB) and she's remained committed to it for more than 25 years.

She played a vital role in establishing Springvale Neighbourhood House and the Family Mediation Centre and shaped state and federal social welfare policies through roles with the Victorian and Australian social service councils.

In recent years Merle has spearheaded efforts to recognise the Enterprise Migrant



**Merle Mitchell with the Enterprise Rose glass sculpture.**

126005

**Picture: GARY SISSONS**

Hostel in Springvale and the role the 30,000 people who lived there from 1970 to 1992 had in shaping the city.

She and other volunteers recorded the hostel's history through an exhibition and website, named a rose in its honour, and installed a rose garden and sculpture on the old Enterprise site.

The council has recognised Merle as a Free Person of the City and a Living Treasure.

In 1991 she was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in the 1991 Queen's Birthday Honours List and received the Promotion of Multiculturalism Award at the Victorian Senior of the Year Awards in 2012.

# The Enterprise history project

Two Springvale locations will feature interpretive signs as part of a project honouring the 30,000 migrants and refugees who lived at the Enterprise Migrant Hostel between 1970 and 1992.

The first two signs will be installed at Springvale Rise Primary School and Centrelink.

The Enterprise History Project was initiated in 2007 by a group of people who had worked with community agencies providing services to Enterprise residents. It led to an exhibition at the Immigration Museum in 2008 and since then community interest has seen the project broaden into The Spirit of Enterprise.

A rose garden was one of the first things people saw when they arrived at the Enterprise Hostel. The rose garden was well cared for and gave people hope they too would be looked after. In 2012 a new rose was officially named the Enterprise rose and became a fitting symbol for the project.

A tribute garden funded by contributions from the community, local community organisations and the Victorian Multicultural Commission, was planted at the site of the hostel, which is now Lexington Gardens Retirement Village.

In a bid to tell the stories connected to the Enterprise Hostel, a series of permanent signs will be installed at sites across the Springvale activity centre.

The final signs will be installed at locations that were important in the journey of new migrants and refugees and include the Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau, Springvale Neighbourhood House, Springvale Community Health Centre and the Springvale retail precinct.

It is hoped the amazing stories of hope and enterprise will inspire residents and visitors and give people a better understanding of the surprising Springvale of today.

Visit [www.enterprisehostel.org.au](http://www.enterprisehostel.org.au) to find out more about the history project.



# Spirit of Enterprise

**A community project to record stories of the migrants and refugees who lived at the Enterprise Migrant Hostel will unveil the final stage of its project this month.**

The Spirit of Enterprise Project has created the Enterprise Trail, a series of 3m tall markers at various locations throughout central Springvale, which celebrate sites special to migrants and refugees through the 1970s and 80s.

The markers contain photos and stories which explain the sites' significance and include information about the people or organisations involved in supporting new arrivals to Australia.

The most recent marker was installed at the site of the Springvale Community Health Service, on the corner of Windsor and Buckingham avenues. This service has been providing health care to the residents of Springvale since 1984. Prior to that date the Enterprise Migrant Hostel provided holistic, integrated and inclusive health services to migrants and refugees.

Other markers have been installed at:

- ▶ The former Springvale Primary School where the Ethnic Teacher's Aide program was piloted
- ▶ Centrelink where unique social security and community

organisation partnerships were developed

- ▶ Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau from where much of the settlement work in the community originated
- ▶ Springvale Neighbourhood House which was built primarily to provide a meeting place for social clubs from different communities.

A final marker will help tell the story of the way in which the Springvale Road shops changed with each new wave of migration and will be launched on 26 March at 2pm. The wider community is invited to help celebrate the completion of the Enterprise Trail.



*Enterprise Trail*

75 10<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2017 J

# A refugees trend-setter

By Casey Neill

Springvale bucked the trend in the way it welcomed refugees in the 1970s.

The final marker is now in place on the Spirit of Enterprise Trail to honour that period in the area's history.

"Let's not forget the lessons that we learnt in the early days about how much a welcome to newly-arrived people creates a great community," organiser Merle Mitchell said.

She was thrilled to launch the final trail point at Lightwood and Springvale roads on Sunday 26 March.

Each landmark has links to the Enterprise Migrant Hostel, now the site of the Lexington Gardens retirement village but for decades a site that welcomed immigrants and refugees.

"So many people contributed right from the very beginning when we put the first exhibition into the Melbourne Immigration Museum," Ms Mitchell said.

"That was back in November 2008."

The project has since included a commemorative rose garden and "had a big impact on a lot of people".

"It's so important to preserve history and actually to learn the lessons from history," she said.

"Springvale was so unique and so different to every other municipality around Victoria.

"It was Springvale who said, right back in 1970 ... 'you are welcome, keep your language, keep your culture, build your places of worship, you are part of the whole'.

"No other place did that.

"There's still a lot in that message for us to learn."

Ms Mitchell hoped the next step would be a board with a map of all the markers, and smaller boards at each marker site so people can walk the whole trail.

She'd also like to see a community walk of the trail ending at the new Springvale community centre once it is complete.



Merle Mitchell is thrilled with the new Spirit of Enterprise Trail marker. 166693

Picture: STEWART CHAMBERS

Councillor Matthew Kirwan launched the marker on behalf of Mayor Jim Memeti.

"My first introduction to the Enterprise Project was within five minutes of being sworn in as a councillor late 2012," he said.

"I can literally remember turning around in the busy meeting rooms of the old Springvale Council Chamber seeing this older woman slowly navigating her way through the crowd from one end of the room to the other to speak to me.

"She said she was Merle Mitchell and wanted to meet with to talk about the Enterprise project."

Cr Kirwan said then-Springvale Mayor Andrew Ericksen's welcome to new arrivals was "hardly radical now, but in a time when the White Australia Policy had just ended and assimilation

was then the accepted norm it was ground-breaking".

"I started meeting more and more residents who had spent time at the Enterprise Hostel and heard their personal stories," Cr Kirwan said.

"Closer to home I learned that my mother-in-law, who had come to Australia from Switzerland in the 1970s, had a link to Enterprise Hostel - her boyfriend at the time had stayed there."

Other markers recognise that the Multicultural Teacher's Aide program started at Springvale Rise Primary School, Springvale Neighbourhood House was built to provide a space for cultural groups to meet, and the Springvale Road shopping centre has always reflected the ever-changing population.