

BUSINESS SOUTH-EAST

World view on business

By CASEY NEILL

"THIS place is just going to go in leaps and bounds. It's pretty exciting."

Paul Kearsley sees endless opportunities to grow the City of Greater Dandenong, and he's in the hot seat to do just that.

He started as the council's Greater Dandenong Business group manager in April this year, heading up its Economic Development, South East Business Networks and Revitalising Central Dandenong units.

Tapping into China is high on his agenda.

"It might be someone down in Dandenong South who makes a component for part of a machine they need, and away they go," Mr Kearsley said.

"It might employ an extra 50 people, or it might employ five people.

"It's got to be better than none."

Mr Kearsley has joined the South East Melbourne Manufacturers Alliance (SEMMA) board.

"For me it's trying to get an understanding of what they're trying to achieve," he said.

"It's about linking in with SEMMA. How do we, as a council, assist?"

Encouraging links with partners in China through the council's sister city relationship with Xuzhou is his first answer. On a visit to the booming manufacturing city in July this year he floated plans to return with a business delegation.



Paul Kearsley has grand plans for Greater Dandenong. 98322

"Opportunity might open up for our businesses to provide products or components to the Chinese market," he said.

"There could be opportunities for companies to open up an office or factory in China.

"The third important part is seeing if we can get investment from them down here."

Mr Kearsley also hopes Chinese businesses will also visit Greater Dandenong and that the council can eventually step back and let the businesses do what they do best.

"They were very keen to come over. They were very willing to make the connections," he said.

"With China it's not about one trip.

"With the Chinese culture it's about trust and creating a relationship, and

that's something we have to educate some of our businesses about.

"You're not going to go in one time and be offered the world."

Mr Kearsley said there were 300 million middle class Chinese people who had money to spend and wanted better products.

"How do we tap into that?" he said. "You only need a very, very small component of that.

"We should be able to replicate what we're doing in China with other places."

Mr Kearsley graduated from RMIT with a Town Planning degree in 1989.

He worked with several Melbourne councils before moving to Cairns, Queensland, for five years.

"It was right at the height of mass development when Cairns was really booming," he said.

"We were meeting people from Taiwan, Singapore and Japan who were wanting to invest multi-multi million dollars.

"That's when I started to get into the economic development side of planning."

He also had a stint in Seattle in the US through a job swap.

"Seattle had gone through some downturn," he said.

"They were really into sourcing companies from other parts of America to relocate to Seattle."

Mr Kearsley said these experiences

broadened his way of thinking.

He worked at Casey council for 18 months, then the City of Yarra before seeking experience outside local government.

He became a planning and property development consultant and his role included helping to roll out Aldi in Victoria.

Next came a stint at the City of Whitehorse and a management role to add to his experience in engineering, economic development, planning and urban design work.

"I was there for about five years and then took a similar role at Monash, but broadened out to include local laws - the lovely things like dogs, parking fines ..., " he said.

Mr Kearsley said working for Greater Dandenong was the ideal next step in his career.

"It's an incredibly interesting place," he said.

"The diversity of the community is just fantastic.

"I used to go to Dandenong Market just to shop. My partner and I loved the diversity and the enthusiasm and the culture.

"It was really lively. I wanted to be part of that."

He said the city's current economic strategy is based around economic resilience.

"Because if you can have economic resilience you can have community resilience," he said.

"There aren't that many councils that are doing it.

"This place is just going to go in leaps and bounds. It's pretty exciting."

Mr Kearsley said local government gave him a sense of delivering for the community that the private sector couldn't.

"I've been involved in building community centres that start with a discussion with community members and finish with opening the doors," he said.

"You feel like you can achieve something."

Since arriving in Greater Dandenong in April he's been "taking stock" - meeting with the key players in the council and community to get an understanding of their vision for the future.

"My job is about relationships," he said. "It's about listening to people."

Aside from boosting manufacturing, he has two main focuses - Revitalising Central Dandenong and building local business networks through SEBN.

"It's about building those networks up and seeing how we can connect to even more," he said.

"Seeing how we can bridge any gaps that we might have. How do we expand that program?"

"The business network thing is about improving capacity and capability of our businesses."

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BUSINESS

CENTRE GIVES DANDY A LIFT

"PAUL KEARSLEY"

(GREATER D'NONG BUSINESS GROUP MGR)

TALKS ABOUT DANDENONG'S FUTURE

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Connecting people and communities D

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CENTRE GIVES DANDY A LIFT

THE OVERSEERS OF THE AMBITIOUS REVITALISING CENTRAL DANDENONG PROJECT ENVISAGE A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR THE PRECINCT. GREATER DANDENONG BUSINESS MANAGERS PAUL KEARSLEY AND KEVIN VAN BOXTEL TOOK THE JOURNAL'S CAMERON LUCADOU-WELLS ON A WALKING TOUR AMONG THE TRANSFORMED STREETS.

"CRANES on the horizon" – that's how Greater Dandenong Business general manager Paul Kearsley gauges central Dandenong's expected economic rebound. Recently, cranes have been busy bringing shape to the council's \$62million municipal building/library/civic square colossus.

Across the road, the completed eight-storey Government Services Office building is a taste of what Mr Kearsley and the council's Revitalising Central Dandenong manager Kevin Van Boxtel hope will be a tall-scale streetscape in the CBD.

Mr Kearsley compares the modernist tax office building in Mason Street to the less predictably shaped new GSO building – Dandenong's sophisticated future will look more like the latter.

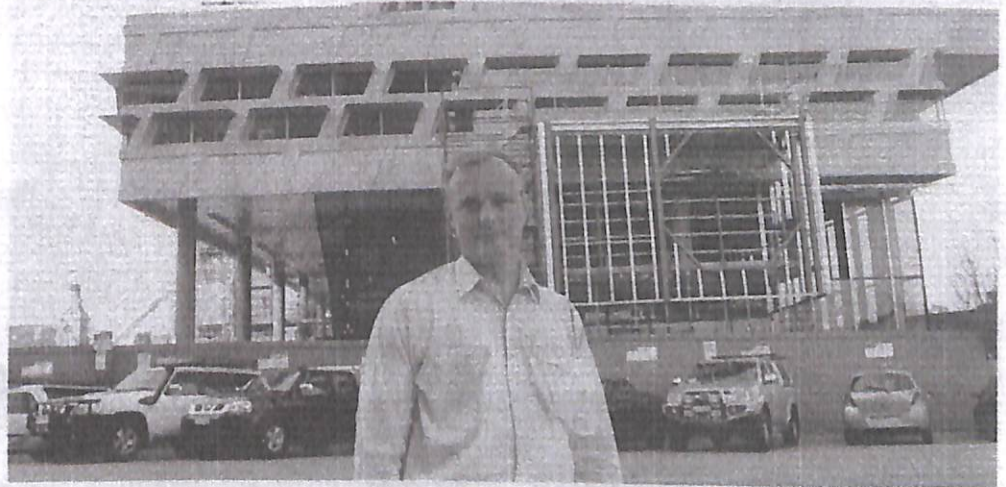
As these buildings sprout, so too would it mark a revival in fortunes for the central business district – historically a thriving shopping district built around its iconic market and stockyards.

Its commercial heydays in the 1960s and '70s slumped into "turbulent" times after big-industry closures such as GM Holden, Heinz and International Harvester, Mr Kearsley said.

Lonsdale Street has been radically transformed as part of Revitalising Central Dandenong works – \$290 million from the State Government.

It is complemented by the council's under-construction civic centre project which is due for completion in March next year, one that will give Dandenong its first public square.

Mr Kearsley said it's now the turn of private investors to complete the jigsaw, to fill the empty sites north of the railway station.



Paul Kearsley at the civic square building site in central Dandenong. 104860

Picture: STEWART CHAMBERS

More than \$500 million in investment is hoped to follow in the next 13 years, as well as 4000 dwellings and 5000 jobs.

The most recent building proposal is for seven-storey offices housing the Australian Tax Office on the corner of Walker Street and Halpin Way.

Halpin Way meanwhile cuts a swathe from the civic centre past Little India – an overdue, easy-to-navigate walkway between the centre of Dandenong and the railway station.

It adjoins Australia's first co-generation plant – a gas turbine producing electricity for the precinct's occupiers.

Mr Kearsley expects further high-rise apartments and offices in the CBD will bring residents and workers into the precinct,

helping to restart stalling trade in Little India and other CBD districts.

"It's often a question of getting the finance to build (developments).

"The interest is there from the private market," Mr Kearsley said.

"The future is getting people to live around this centre to support retail, restaurants and the (Dandenong) market. Then we'll see the change in retailing in Lonsdale Street."

He points to the vacant hoarded site, which will be the future tax office home.

"You'll see the cranes here mid next year and then at the sites after that.

"People will continue to see this activity and you'll see the development industry get interested."