



Making it work: The Noble 600 restaurant, part of the Ashburton Club and Mutual School of Arts, which is now looking for a new boss. MSA general manager Kevin Kamat leaves next month to join family in the United States, and he departs hoping his wish for the club to evolve into a community hub is followed through.

## ▶ OUR VIEW

# From exclusive to inclusive MSA

Let's call it an imperative shift, an evolve and thrive opportunity. And no-one understands that better than Kevin Kamat.

He's the soon-to-depart general manager of the Ashburton Club and Mutual School of Arts, leaving in early March to link up with family in Pennsylvania in the United States (see our story on page 3).

Kamat's saying goodbye a bit sooner than planned, having been in charge at the MSA for a tick over a year.

His departure will be felt by MSA staff, club members and its executive committee because in a short period of time he's made a big difference.

He's addressed some antiquated business and money flow practices by introducing the Xero online accounting software program and a new technology cash sorting and



**Daryl Holden**

counting system.

Even more importantly, Kamat has been a good fit. He's a likeable and softly spoken character, who has refused to have an office because he wants to be accessible and available whenever he's in the MSA, which has been something of an institution in Ashburton since 1885 when it was initially a gentleman's club.

Now, though, Kamat leaves hoping his vision of transforming the MSA into a community hub is acted on because he's right on the money with that dream. The club, though busier now on Fridays and

Saturdays than it apparently has been for some time, is certainly not the force it once was or could be again.

Yes, its membership rate has slightly increased and having 3300 is no mean feat. But for some there remains a stigma with the organisation, that it's not a place for younger people, families, or women, and that it's perhaps seen as more of a drinking barn for retired gents or older businessmen.

Now, that may seem harsh, but it's the perception some in our community have. Right or wrong, it's a perception that must change if the club is to not only survive but to thrive and grow. And remember, two years ago it nearly collapsed because of alleged financial mismanagement.

Somewhat ironically, it took a newcomer to Ashburton in Kamat, a successful businessman with

a history of transforming failing organisations, to identify its staid image built up over all those years. And he did it almost immediately, saying the club must evolve into a community hub.

"It's about creating a community feeling and understanding that the club is not a standalone (entity) by itself," he said.

"The entire community and the club should benefit from each other."

Just what that looks like is limited only by one's imagination but picture a hub that's a multi-functional, inclusive space that serves as a focal point for a diverse range of activities and services within a community. Imagine a place that goes beyond the traditional concept of a club or facility, that is accessible and welcoming for people of all ages and backgrounds, that is Ashburton's leading venue

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## ▶ YOUR VIEW

### Chess pieces

As president of the Ashburton Chess Club for many years I was surprised and excited to hear a chessboard was in the children's playground at our new library.

Our chess pieces had been found and given a makeover by Jim Armstrong men's shed team.

I went and played a game with old friend Stewart Bennett and found that the board and surroundings were perfect.

I sincerely thank the person who thought of it and all that were involved in making it happen. Thanks again!

*Roy Keeling*

## ▶ LETTERS

We welcome your letters and emails, but:

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for functions and the like. And consider having a hub that facilitates partnerships with local businesses, community groups, and organisations for collaborative initiatives. The list could go on.

How to get there is not straight forward and Kamat knows bold change needs bold action.

It requires the MSA to be brave, to acknowledge their shortcomings and to identify what the future could look like if nothing was done.

Initially, a lot will come down to establishing a refreshing new image that connects and engages with the wider community.

But MSA members, please be warned. Sticking a new hat on Barbie doesn't make it a new Barbie. It's more complex than that. Superficial changes will never be enough.

The hard work should begin now. Just ask Kevin Kamat.