

# Merger moves forward

By CAITLIN DELL

THE merger of Wangaratta's two public secondary schools took another symbolic step last night at the first ever joint meeting of the Wangaratta High School and Owens College school councils.

The meeting marked the beginning of the formal procedural process to merge the schools' governing bodies,

in the lead up to next year's merger of the schools.

Meeting chairperson Ken Jasper (MLA, Murray Valley) said the outcomes of the meeting would help determine the future of the two schools under the name of Wangaratta High School.

Following a merger update from representatives of both schools, discussion centred on the appointment of a joint school

council working party.

The working party is set to make recommendations to the two school councils on the role and composition of an interim school council.

Mr Jasper said the existing school councils would continue to deal with routine bureaucratic issues relating to their schools, until November, when it is anticipated they would be dissolved.

An interim council will then commence with representatives from both schools, and a new council will be elected at the annual school council elections to be held for all state schools in March 2007.

The merger, given the green light in April this year by Education and Training Minister, Lynne Kosky, will create one of the region's biggest high schools, with

an expected 1300 students.

Under the proposed school structure, the current high school site in Edwards Street will offer a year seven to 12 program with a stronger academic focus in years 10 to 12.

The current Owens College site in Greta Road will initially offer an applied learning program for year 10 to 12, in association with Goulburn Owens Institute of TAFE.

## Police charges over \$29,000 deception

A FORMER Wangaratta businessman has been charged with attaining property by deception.

Wangaratta detectives travelled to the 33 year old's home in the Bendigo area this week to interview him.

The man was subsequently charged at Bendigo police station with four counts of attaining property by deception, totalling \$29,000.

It is alleged the offences were committed this year in Wangaratta against individuals.

The man was bailed to appear at Wangaratta court on August 21.

## Public payphones may be axed

By SALLY EVANS

WANGARATTA could be stripped of up to nine public payphones to cut costs for Telstra Country Wide.

The communications giant is proposing to remove the facilities because of low patronage and to reduce ongoing costs of maintaining and repairing vandalism.

The proposal has been met with objections from Peter Vaughan, who took up a petition to stop the removal of his neighborhood phone-booth in Edwards Street.

He said he had considered joining the growing number of people cutting off their landline phone because of increasing rental costs.

"I was upset about Telstra increasing the charges on landline rental," he said.

"I was going to get rid of this (home) phone and use the public phone... but I found out they were going to move it. "So I'm going to have to keep the landline and pay the rent."

The Rural City of Wangaratta has also vowed to fight the payphone removal, with concerns it would impact on older people, low-income families and tourists.

Councillor Neville Wright moved a motion at a meeting this week to seek comment from residents on the proposed changes.

### Payphones to be removed

- 75 Edwards St
- 20 Ely St
- 2 Floyd St
- 49 Mackay St
- 30 Manley Cr
- Painters Island
- 5 Phillipson St
- 95 Templeton St
- 110 Williams Rd

"I hate losing any amenities in the town," he said.

"You take phones out, what goes next?"

"The phones look like they're pretty well packed in the main town areas, so I think what we're doing is the right thing."

The motion was supported by acting mayor, Roberto Paino, who feared if the phones were taken away, the city would never get them back.

"People see it as a convenience and I suppose a lot of these public phones are a safety net," he said.

"It only needs to be used once in an emergency and that justifies their existence."

However, Telstra area general manager for northern Victoria, Robert Bell, said the payphones earmarked for removal were non-profitable and often vandalised.

"In Wangaratta at the moment, there's about 39 payphones," he said.

"Two of them are on private property, they are on private caravan parks, they're running at a loss and they get vandalised."



## State acts on 'sub-standard' police cells

HOLDING cells at Wangaratta Police Station will receive an upgrade, as part of a state government bid to improve detention facilities across Victoria.

Thirteen police watchhouses throughout the state will be upgraded as part of the \$3.8 million overhaul, while more than 50 cells would be closed, including those at Mansfield and Benalla.

The government announcement followed a report released this week by the Victorian Ombudsman, which revealed current lock-up conditions were "sub-standard" and overcrowding in cells continued to be a problem.

Minister for Police, Tim Holding, said concerns highlighted by the ombudsman would be alleviated by the overhaul.

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## Stem cell therapy for rare brain disease

From page 1

But the diagnosis offered no joy as Mrs Keenan was told there was no cure or treatment.

"For the next 18 months we tried everything from natural medicine, to massage and probably the most important thing was Jill's positive approach to exercise," said Mac, husband of 40 years and owner of Wangaratta business Bluewave Pools and Spas.

"Every morning she would do approximately two hours of exercise.

"But the symptoms, of balance and speech difficulties, persisted."

The couple, and family members, surfed the world via the internet, and eventually came upon details of

revolutionary treatment in China.

"We spoke to patients that had been through Nanshan, and with the encouragement of our children (Chris, Allison and Michael), we decided to come here," Mr Keenan said.

"It was a big step making the decision to go to a country that is a mystery to us, where we cannot speak or understand the language."

Mr Keenan yesterday told the Chronicle, via email, that Jill had completed the course of stem cell injections and will continue extensive rehabilitation, involving walking and voice muscle exercises.

He said she had made improvements in her walking - yesterday

walking about 30 metres unaided, to the applause of the other patients.

"When we came we were looking for a miracle no matter how small. On a daily basis we see these, the improvements in Jill and the other patients here," he said.

"The doctors believe these improvements are not the end, as the stem cells will continue to grow over the next six to 12 months.

"Together with the exercise regime that they have put in place, we will see further improvement as they have seen in the other patients that they have treated."

The Keenans are to return from China at the end of the month.

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