WAGGA WAGGA BUSINESS CHAMBER

1936 - 2026

Sources & Acknowledgements

Trove National Library, Australia
Wagga Wagga & District Historical Society
The Daily Advertiser
Museum of the Riverina

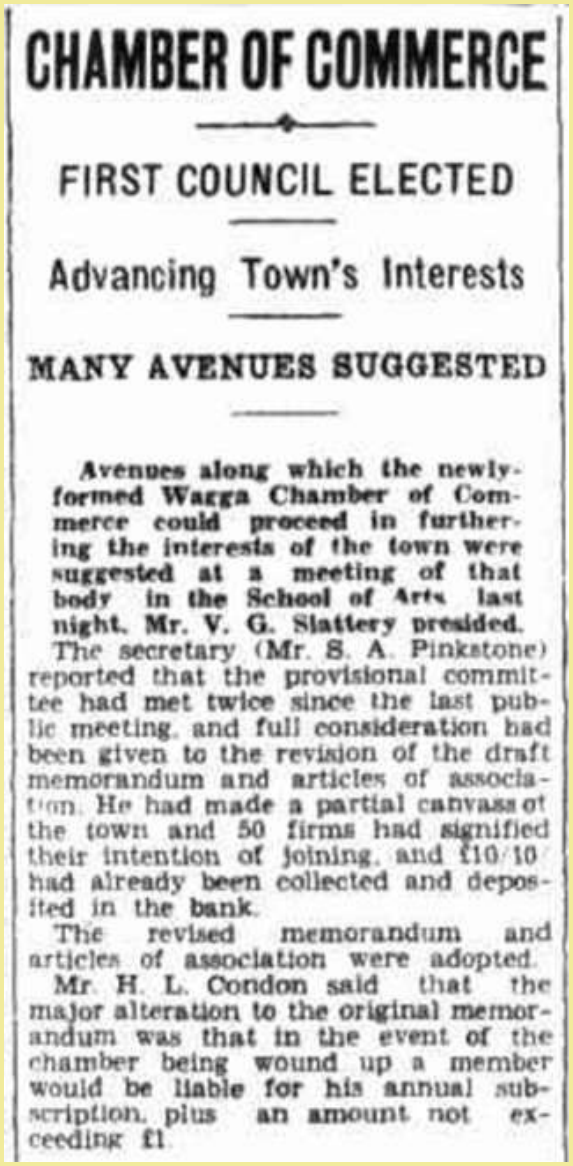
Disclaimer -

The Wagga Wagga Business Chamber has a rich and extensive history spanning nine decades. With such a long history, it is not possible to capture every person, event, initiative or milestone that has formed part of our story. This document has therefore been compiled using the resources available to us, with content selected based on accessibility and relevance.

The Chamber also holds an extensive collection of historical minute books and records. The volume of material is significant and would take many years to fully review and document. These records capture the people, ideas, decisions and sometimes colourful moments that have shaped Wagga Wagga's business community and contributed to the growth of our city.

We acknowledge everyone who has played a part in the Chamber's history. If you have a memory, photograph, document or fact to share, we would love to hear from you.

From the very beginning...



CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

FIRST COUNCIL ELECTED

Advancing Town's Interests

MANY AVENUES SUGGESTED

Avenues along which the newly-formed Wagga Chamber of Commerce could proceed in furthering the interests of the town were suggested at a meeting of that body in the School of Arts last night. Mr. V. G. Slattery presided.

The secretary (Mr. S. A. Pinkstone) reported that the provisional committee had met twice since the last public meeting, and full consideration had been given to the revision of the draft memorandum and articles of association. He had made a partial canvass of the town and 50 firms had signified their intention of joining, and £10/10/ had already been collected and deposited in the bank.

The revised memorandum and articles of association were adopted.

Mr. H. L. Condon said that the major alteration to the original memorandum was that in the event of the chamber being wound up a member would be liable for his annual subscription, plus an amount not exceeding £1.

Newspaper report announcing the formation of the Wagga Chamber of Commerce, published 9 October 1936. Source: Trove, National Library of Australia.

There were three significant attempts to establish a local Chamber of Commerce in Wagga Wagga.

The first Chamber of Commerce emerged in 1878, led by honorary secretary W.C. Hunter. Originally evolving from the Wagga Wagga Postal Reform Committee, it aimed to broaden advocacy on business and civic issues but it folded within a few years.

A second Chamber was formed in 1908, when local business leaders created what was initially described as a traders' association, officially named the Wagga Chamber of Commerce. Declining membership, irregular meetings, and the impact of World War I contributed to its gradual fade, with little activity recorded after 1917.

The third and enduring Chamber was established in 1936, following action by the Wagga Storekeepers' Association. A public meeting at the Town Hall formally resolved to create a new Chamber of Commerce, appointing a provisional committee and office bearers.

Then and now

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE ELECT OFFICE-BEARERS

The annual general meetings of all sections of the Wagga Chember of Commerce have been completed and office-bearers for the following year have been elected, the scretary of the Chamber of Commerce (Mr. S. Hamill) said yesterday.

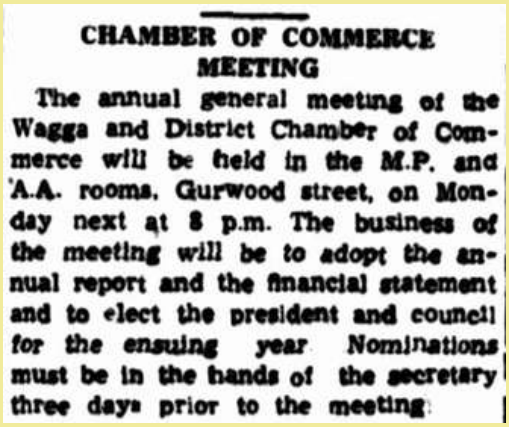
In the Storekeepers' section, Mr. L. P. Johnston was re-elected chairman and Mr. S. R. Castles was elected vice-chairman. Mr. J. Bosworth was selected as the Section's representative on the Chamber of Commerce Council.

The Section agreed that all Wagga storekeepers should be asked voluntarily to close their stores at 12.30 p.m. on the afternoon of the Wagga Gold Cup, and also at 12.30 p.m. on the second and third days of the Wagga Annual Show.

In the Cafe Section, Mr. A E. Karofilis was re-elected chairman, Mr. C. B. Poulos vice-chairman and Mr. Karofilis the Section representative on the Chamber of Commerce Council.

Mr. J. G. Todd was re-elected chairman of the Livestock Carriers' Section, Mr. R. G. Wooden vice-chairman and Mr. L. F Lawrence was re-elected the Section representative on the Chamber of Commerce Council.

Newspaper report sharing the outcomes of the Wagga Chamber of Commerce Annual General Meeting, published 7 December 1951. Source: Trove, National Library of Australia.



CHAMBER OF COMMERCE MEETING

The annual general meeting of the Wagga and District Chamber of Commerce will be held in the M.P. and A.A. rooms, Gurwood street, on Monday next at 8 p.m. The business of the meeting will be to adopt the annual report and the financial statement and to elect the president and council for the ensuing year. Nominations must be in the hands of the secretary three days prior to the meeting.

Newspaper report announcing the Annual General Meeting of the Wagga Chamber of Commerce published 4 November 1944. Source: Trove, National Library of Australia.

Photo from the Wagga Wagga Business Chamber Annual General Meeting 2025.

Community Advancement

Winners drawn yesterday for the top prizes in the Wagga and District Chamber of Commerce Community Advancement Fund competition. The first prize, a return trip for two to America and $500 spending money plus accommodation and meals was won by Mr. M. Webb, of Day Street. Second prize, a colour television was won by Mr. and Mrs. J. A. Terry, Thorne Street, Wagga. Mr. Graeme Irons, president of the Wagga Chamber of Commerce, drew the winning tickets with Sgt. Bruce Piercy acting as scrutineer. Miss Wagga, 1976, Judy Bourne, and the Charity Queen, far right, Judy Hamilton, also took part in the draw.

Court a

BRISBANE Wed. A year-old Sydney man appear in Ro Magistrate's Co tomorrow after be further remanded custody today.

Bruce John Drawbrid 48, of Sydney, appeared the Magistrate's Court

2 The Daily Advertiser, Thurs., Jan. 8, 1976

In 1946, the Community Advancement Fund was established to support "sporting, social, cultural, educational and recreational activities" across Wagga.

The Fund became an important way for the Chamber to contribute to the wider community, supporting a range of sporting, cultural and community initiatives.

Its legacy can be seen in projects across the city. Chamber funds helped establish Robertson Oval, named after long-serving Chamber president Cam Robertson, and contributed to the purchase of Wagga's first grand piano.

The Fund was also instrumental in establishing the Miss Wagga Quest, which became a successful annual fundraising event that continues today. Among its achievements, funds raised through the Quest contributed to the development of the Wagga Wagga Civic Theatre.

The Community Advancement Fund demonstrates how the Chamber's role has long extended beyond business, contributing to the growth and development of the wider community.

President of the Wagga Chamber of Commerce, Mr. G. Irons, places the Community Advancement Fund Charity Queen sash on Miss Sue McGinn. Sue wore an attractive pink gown with a gathered bodice and topped with a short sleeved bolero.

Newspaper clipping from 1974. Source: The Daily Advertiser via Wagga Wagga & District Historical Society.

WAGGA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDU

A COLOURFUL HISTORY

This year marks the 50ieth anniversary of the Wagga Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

On September 18, 1936, a public meeting was held in the Town Hall to consider the formation of a Chamber of Commerce in Wagga.

The meeting was chaired by the then Deputy Mayor, Ald W J Stevenson, who then handed over to the duly elected chairman, Mr Vince Slattery.

At this meeting, Mr E Fenn Lusher was appointed honorary solicitor, and he explained the difference between being an incorporated and an unincorporated body, and the meeting decided that the new Chamber of Commerce should become incorporated — a decision that was rescinded on March 12, 1937.

The Chamber did not actually become incorporated until 1949, when it became necessary to start the Commerce Permanent Building Society.

Mr D E Lawrence was appointed honorary treasurer, and Mr S A Pinkstone honorary secretary at the first meeting.

The first meeting of the provisional committee — which comprised all who attended the public meeting — followed immediately, and it was decided to get in touch with all kindred organisations and to open a bank account at the Union Bank.

The meeting of the committee to consider the formation of a Chamber of Commerce was held at Bellairs Commercial Hotel (now Romano's) on September 1, 1936, and the body was duly named "The Wagga Wagga Chamber of Commerce, Incorporated".

Mr P Turner was appointed to draw up a constitution, and subscription fees were set as follows; for 20 employees or more five guineas, 15-20 employees four guineas, 10-15 employees three guineas, 5-10 employees two guineas, under 5 employees one guinea, no employees 10 shillings and sixpence, departmental managers five shillings.

The first general meeting of the Chamber of Commerce was held in the School of Arts Building on November 13, 1936.

With the mundane business out of the road, the important issues discussed at this first general meeting included:

- That the Department of Education be urged to proceed with the establishment of a proper technical school in a centrally situated position in Wagga;
- Organisers of the South Australian Centenary be written to offering accommodation for participants in the Centenary Motor Rally on December 19, 1936. Wagga subsequently was an overnight stop, which proved very successful;
- The president and secretary were requested to interview the Wagga Postmaster requesting that lights on mail boxes be left on for a longer period than was the case, and that there be an extension of mail closing times;
- The District Superintendent of Railways, Junee, be requested to instal a telephone box at the Wagga Railway Station;
- Mr Lusher reported on the position regarding the establishment of an aerodrome at Wagga;
- Mr Castles outlined details of old people's homes in other towns, and it was agreed this was a matter for deep consideration;
- A discussion took place on the question of signs being placed on private property near main roads, drawing attention to the road leading to Wagga.

The first annual general meeting of the Chamber was held on October 29, 1937.

And so, the long history of the Wagga Chamber of Commerce began.

It was a history that was colourful to say the least, and involved nearly every project carried out in Wagga, especially in those early years.

The members of the Chamber were an influential body of men, and it was at their instigation that many services for the community were set up.

Under the auspices of the Chamber, a Community Advancement Fund was established, with its own committee to raise funds to advance sporting activities in the city.

Among the many services established in the community as a direct result of the Chamber's activities, were the Wagga District Nursing Service, the Commerce Permanent Building Society, the Wagga Tourist Bureau and the Wagga Nightwatchman's Service.

Out of the Community Advancement Fund, which operated as an independent committee under the umbrella of the Chamber, came the Miss Wagga Quest — the most successful fundraising annual event in Wagga.

But, apart from these successful efforts, the Chamber was also vitally interested in many other aspects of community life.

Robertson Oval was established with funds from the Chamber of Commerce, and named after long-time president, and also president for 14 years of the Community Advancement Fund, Mr Cam Robertson, while the grandstand at Robertson Oval was named Hamill Stand, after Mr Jack Hamill, the man who served the greatest number of years as secretary of the Chamber.

Over $10,000, raised from one of the earliest Miss Wagga Quests, was handed to the Wagga City Council for a Town Hall Fund, and later diverted to help build the Civic Theatre.

The Chamber also provided funds for the purchase of Wagga's first grand piano.

One of its early disappointments was the failure to have the City Council move the old rubbish tip from the extreme northern end of town, which members believed was responsible for the high incidence of starlings.

However, the Chamber was successful in procuring a bulldozer to have the rubbish in the tip covered.

The Chamber has also been a big mover in having improvements made to the Olympic Way, and for the construction of the proposed Gobba Bridge.

The early history of the Chamber is long and interesting, with the minutes of every meeting recorded and kept in books in the Chamber's Baylis Street offices.

They show not only the work of the Chamber, but also the growth of a rural city into the largest country centre in New South Wales.

DA Thurs 20 March 1986 p13.

Excerpt from The Daily Advertiser, 1986.

Local Business Advocacy

For 90 years, the Wagga Wagga Business Chamber has stood alongside local businesses, advocating on the issues that matter most. While the context has evolved, many of the challenges facing business today are the same ones raised decades ago, highlighting the enduring role of the Chamber as a trusted voice for local enterprise.

Crime prevention has long been a concern for local businesses. In the late 1960s, rising shop theft prompted the Chamber to work closely with police, including hosting a crime prevention workshop in 1968 attended by more than 250 business owners. This advocacy continued in 1969, when Detective Sergeant Les Lundie addressed a Chamber luncheon, urging retailers to take a firm and united approach to shop stealing.

Anti-shoplifting campaigner, Mrs. Gillian Feest flanked by president of the Wagga Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Graeme Irons (right) and vice-president, Mr. Gordon Braid, at yesterday's luncheon in the Wagga R.S.L. Club.

Above: Local newspaper segment, documenting a Wagga Chamber of Commerce luncheon (1974). Source: Wagga Wagga & District Historical Society.

ment DETECTIVE GUEST SPEAKER

The detective-in-charge of Wagga C.I.B., Det. Sgt. Les Lundie, has called on local business houses to launch a concerted campaign against shop stealers, particularly juveniles.

'Ignore sob stories from people caught stealing'

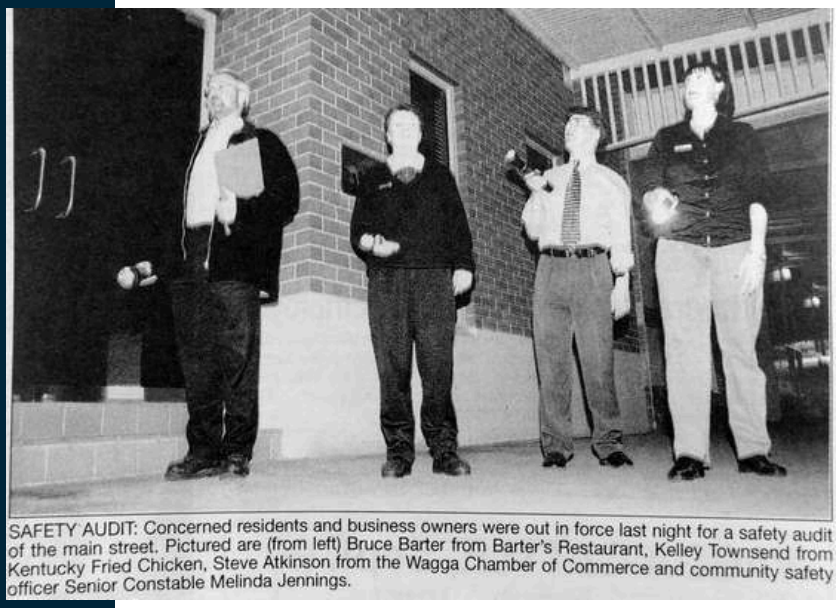
New reference

Air crash findings

Left: Local newspaper segment, documenting a Wagga Chamber of Commerce luncheon addressing retail crime (1969). Source: Wagga Wagga & District Historical Society.

Local Business Advocacy

By 1999, concerns around safety after dark again brought business and police together. Local business representatives joined police officers to patrol Wagga's main streets, assessing how safe the city was for traders, workers and customers after hours.



SAFETY AUDIT: Concerned residents and business owners were out in force last night for a safety audit of the main street. Pictured are (from left) Bruce Barter from Barter's Restaurant, Kelley Townsend from Kentucky Fried Chicken, Steve Atkinson from the Wagga Chamber of Commerce and community safety officer Senior Constable Melinda Jennings.

Right: The Daily Advertiser newspaper segment, sharing main street safety audit (1999). Source: Wagga Wagga & District Historical Society.

Photo from the 2025 Crime Prevention Forum.

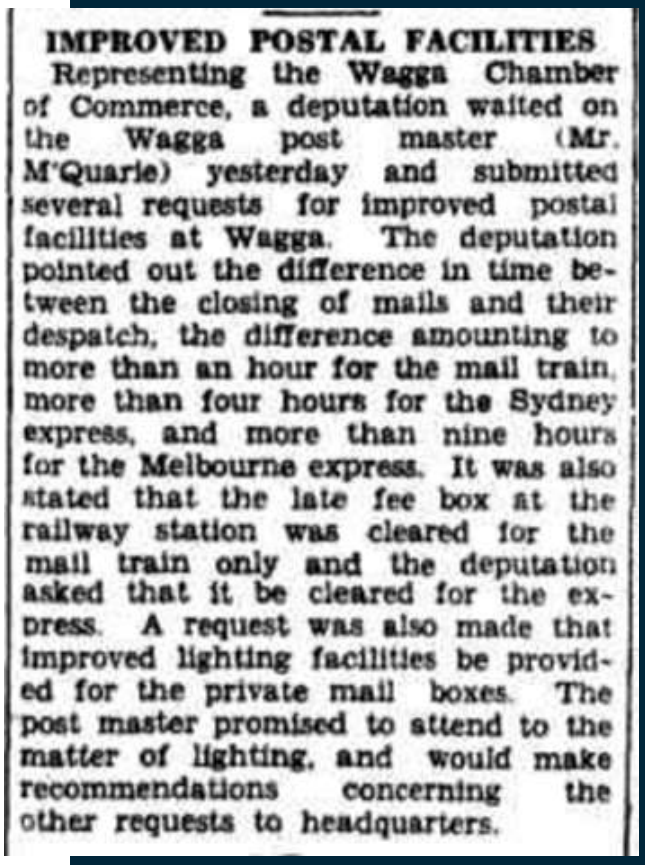
More than half a century later, local crime remains a real issue. In 2025, the Chamber once again brought businesses together to focus on crime prevention, reinforcing the importance of collaboration, awareness and advocacy to keep local trading areas safe.

Local Business Advocacy

Workforce support, including childcare and accommodation, is another challenge that has persisted across generations. In 1973, the Chamber sponsored child minding centres in the lead-up to Christmas, supporting more than 800 children and helping parents remain in the workforce during a critical trading period. Today, access to affordable childcare continues to impact workforce participation, particularly for small businesses and shift-based industries.

Similarly, in 1999, the Chamber advocated for temporary accommodation solutions for building trade workers during a period of strong growth, recognising that housing availability directly affects business capacity. Housing and accommodation pressures remain a key issue in Wagga Wagga today.

Infrastructure and services have also been central to the Chamber's advocacy from the beginning. As early as 1936, a deputation representing the Chamber approached the local postmaster to seek improved postal facilities, acknowledging the importance of reliable services for business efficiency.



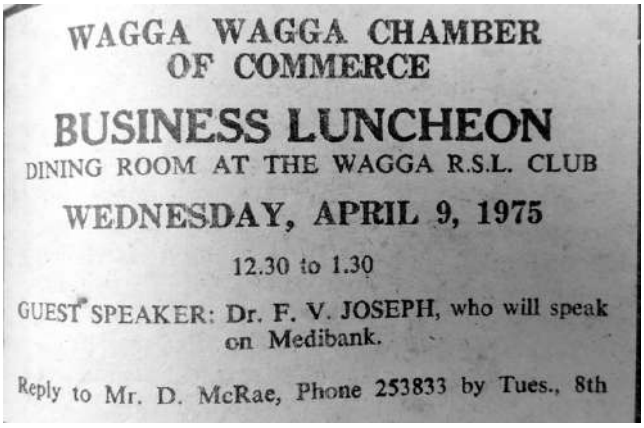
IMPROVED POSTAL FACILITIES

Representing the Wagga Chamber of Commerce, a deputation waited on the Wagga post master (Mr. M'Quarie) yesterday and submitted several requests for improved postal facilities at Wagga. The deputation pointed out the difference in time between the closing of mails and their despatch, the difference amounting to more than an hour for the mail train, more than four hours for the Sydney express, and more than nine hours for the Melbourne express. It was also stated that the late fee box at the railway station was cleared for the mail train only and the deputation asked that it be cleared for the express. A request was also made that improved lighting facilities be provided for the private mail boxes. The post master promised to attend to the matter of lighting, and would make recommendations concerning the other requests to headquarters.

Newspaper report sharing a request for improved postal facilities initiated by the Wagga Chamber of Commerce published 24 November 1936. Source: Trove, National Library of Australia.

Bringing Business Together

Across generations, the Chamber has created spaces for local businesses to come together, stay informed, share ideas and better understand the forces shaping their operating environment. From formal events and luncheons to seminars, briefings and collaborative projects, these moments of connection have helped local business owners navigate change, plan for the future and feel part of something bigger than their individual enterprise.



WAGGA WAGGA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

BUSINESS LUNCHEON

DINING ROOM AT THE WAGGA R.S.L. CLUB

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 1975

12.30 to 1.30

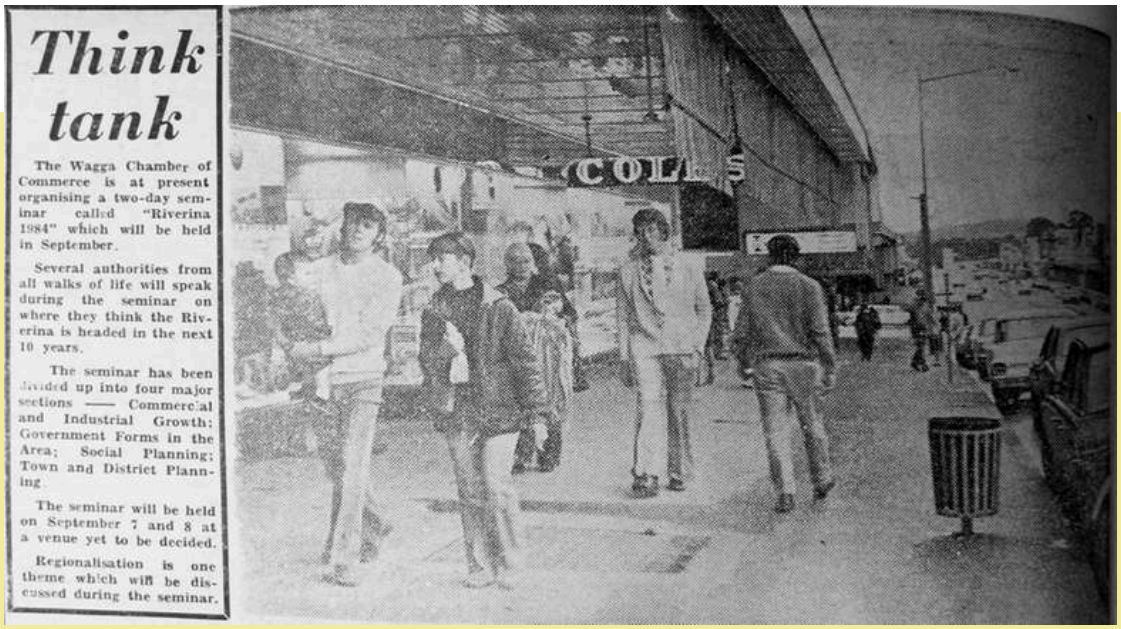
GUEST SPEAKER: Dr. F. V. JOSEPH, who will speak on Medibank.

Reply to Mr. D. McRae, Phone 253833 by Tues., 8th

Newspaper report announcing upcoming Wagga Wagga Chamber of Commerce business luncheon (1975). Source: The Daily Advertiser via Wagga Wagga & District Historical Society.

Over the decades, Chamber events have reflected the issues of the time — economic reform, regional development, industry change and community priorities. By hosting speakers, facilitating discussion and encouraging open dialogue, the Chamber has consistently acted as a bridge between business, government and the wider community.

Newspaper report announcing upcoming Wagga Wagga Chamber of Commerce 'Riverina 1984' seminar focused on where the Riverina was headed in the next decade (1974). Source: The Daily Advertiser via Wagga Wagga & District Historical Society.



Think tank

The Wagga Chamber of Commerce is at present organising a two-day seminar called "Riverina 1984" which will be held in September.

Several authorities from all walks of life will speak during the seminar on where they think the Riverina is headed in the next 10 years.

The seminar has been divided up into four major sections — Commercial and Industrial Growth; Government Forms in the Area; Social Planning; Town and District Planning.

The seminar will be held on September 7 and 8 at a venue yet to be decided.

Regionalisation is one theme which will be discussed during the seminar.

Bringing Business Together

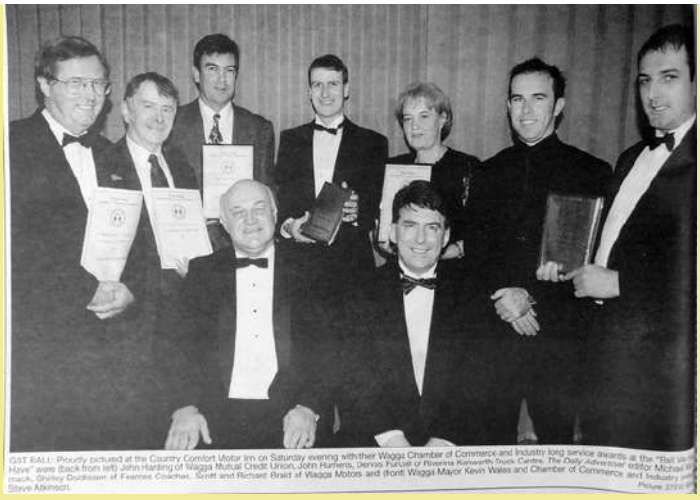
Bringing business together has also included celebrating success. Since 1986, the Chamber has proudly recognised local achievement through its Golden Crow business awards, creating an enduring tradition of acknowledging excellence, resilience and leadership within the Wagga Wagga business community.

Whether through learning, advocacy, collaboration or celebration, these gatherings have strengthened relationships, built trust and reinforced the value of a connected business community. While the formats and venues have evolved, the purpose has remained the same — to unite local businesses, support their growth and contribute to a stronger regional economy.

Photo from the Wagga Wagga Business Chamber Golden Crow Awards 2025 (Credit: Matt Beaver).

ONE OF THE MOST impressive of the decorated floats which took part in last Saturday's street procession during the Wagga Jubilee celebrations was the Chamber of Commerce float. —Raymond Johnson photo

Newspaper image published in The Daily Advertiser, May 1951. Source: Trove, National Library of Australia.



Newspaper report sharing Wagga Wagga Chamber of Commerce and Industry long service awards (2000). Source: The Daily Advertiser via Wagga Wagga & District Historical Society.

Miss Wagga Wagga Quest

The contemporary Miss Wagga Wagga Quest began through the Chamber's Community Advancement Fund. In 1948, the Chamber planned an expanded New Year's Eve carnival featuring a street procession, entertainment and the Miss Wagga Wagga competition.

The first carnival was held on 31 December 1948, bringing together businesses, sporting organisations and community groups. Fifteen candidates participated, with finalists selected based on the funds they had raised. The celebrations attracted an estimated crowd of up to 10,000 and would grow into a major annual community event.

Chamber of Commerce float from the first New Year's Eve Carnival, 1948. Image courtesy of Lost Wagga Wagga, reproduced by the Museum of the Riverina.

Over the decades, Quest entrants raised money for local charities, organisations and community projects. The Quest also became connected to Wagga Wagga's Sister City relationships, including an exchange with Leavenworth, Kansas, beginning in 1963.

The Miss Wagga Wagga Quest developed into a longstanding community program focused on fundraising, community service and developing local representatives.

The first Miss Wagga Wagga, Thena Karofilis, 1948. Image: Sherry Morris Collection, reproduced via The Daily Advertiser.

Further reading:

Miss Wagga Wagga Quest History

Wagga Wagga City Council – Sister Cities

People of the Chamber

From its earliest days, the Wagga Wagga Business Chamber has been shaped by the people who stepped forward to lead. In the early years, local businesspeople elected committees and office-bearers to advocate for shared priorities and support a growing business community. Over time, this evolved into the contemporary governance structure we know today, with an elected Board of Directors guiding the Chamber's strategic direction.

What has never changed is the Chamber's reliance on the commitment of local businesses, businesspeople, and business leaders. For more than nine decades, many have supported the Chamber by volunteering their time, sharing their expertise, and championing the interests of the broader business community.

It is because of these individuals, past and present, that the Wagga Wagga Business Chamber continues to support, connect, and advocate for local business today.

NEW BOARD ELECTED: The 1997-98 Wagga Chamber of Commerce and Industry board of management announced at the chamber's annual general meeting last night. (Back, from left) John Rumens, Dave Palmer, Peter Andersen, Chris Fry, Ian Begg and (front, from left) Greg Brown, Liz Richardson, John de la Torre (outgoing president), Margaret O'Dwyer and Steve Atkinson. Absent are John Dixon and Marea Bright.

NEW BOARD: The newly appointed board members of the Wagga Chamber of Commerce and Industry are (front, from left) Steve Atkinson, Dave Palmer, Charles Hardy, Liz Richardson, John Rumens, Garry Williams, (back, from left) Greg Brown, Joe Fealy, Chris Fry, John Dixon, Daryl Maguire and Mick Lucke. Picture: STEVE BEAZLEY

NEW BOARD: Wagga Chamber of Commerce recently elected a new board of directors. The group, which will lead the organisation into the next millennium, includes (back) David Font, Joe Fealy, John Rumens, Mick Lucke, Steve Atkinson, Bill Arthur, Greg Harris, (front) Sandra Thompson, David Palmer, Jodie Atkins and Liz Richardson. (Absent are Glenn Towle, Charles Hardy and Garry Williams.)

Photos: Elected board of directors for Wagga Chamber of Commerce 1997, 1998 and 1999. Source: The Daily Advertiser via Wagga Wagga & District Historical Society.

Join the Chamber

The Wagga Wagga Business Chamber is a community of individuals and businesses that are passionate about all things business.

From the minute you join, you will have access to a network of business people representing all areas of Wagga Wagga's diverse economy as well as advice, learning resources and other member only benefits.

Feel free to reach out at any time to discuss membership and how it might benefit your business.

Phone Number

0432 100 797

Email Address

info@waggachamber.com.au

Website

waggachamber.com.au

Social Media

@waggabusinesschamber

WAGGA WAGGA BUSINESS CHAMBER