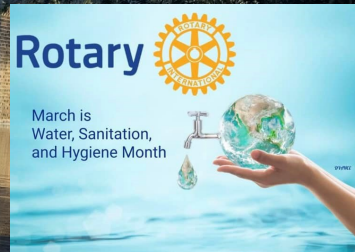


Rotary
Club of Penrith



Club Bulletin

ROTARY CLUB OF PENRITH INC
ABN 29 831 033 625

District 9685 Club Number 18079 Established 1945

- Club President Joh Dickens * District Governor Mina Howard
- * Secretary Trevor Hall * Email all correspondence to rotaryclubofpenrith@gmail.com

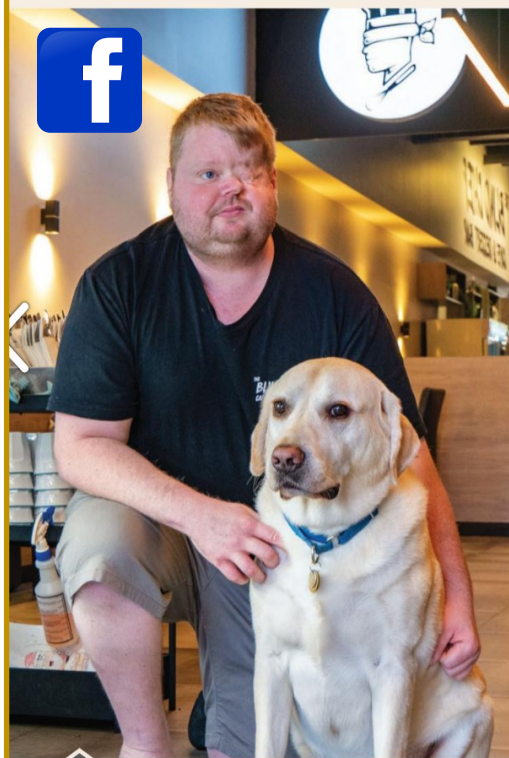
**NEXT MEETING:- Monday 20th March, 6:30 for 7:00 p.m. at the
PENRITH BOWLING CLUB**

LAST MEETING was a special social night at the **BLIND CHEF CAFÉ & DESSERT BAR** wonderful to have members from Nepean & Penrith Valley Rotary join us to hear the incredible journey of **CRAIG SHANAHAN** in the face of adversity and to enjoy the delicious food prepared for us.



LEGENDS OF THE NEPEAN

CRAIG SHANAHAN



Craig kneeling with Rocko



BY NOEL ROWSELL

IT would be fair to say Craig Shanahan (the Blind Chef Cafe & Dessert Bar) has been given far more than his fair share of adversity in his 32 years.

Craig was diagnosed with cancer at the age of two, having his left eye removed in the operation to remove the cancer and save his life.

The chemotherapy and radiation therapy he received from the ages of 2 - 5 hindered his physical development and affected his heart, which led to complications and corrective surgery later in life, including foot reconstruction to both feet.

As a 23-year old, Craig was beginning to put a career together as a successful chef, before being diagnosed with a brain tumour and consequently losing the sight in his right eye.

In 2022, Craig was struggling to overcome the challenges of Covid on his new business when his heart finally began to succumb to the ravages of his past health issues and in early 2023, he received a heart transplant.

Craig is now back at work, with a new team (which includes his mother Sue, sister Amanda, 3rd-year apprentice chef Antoine and casual chefs as well as front of house staff Ayla, Georgie, Keisha and Livie) looking to once again build the Blind Chef Cafe & Dessert Bar into a must-visit destination in Penrith.

Born in Nepean Hospital in 1991, Craig lived in St

Clair, attending Blackwell PS and Erskine Park HS.

He was a successful baseball player, comfortable as Pitcher, Catcher or Third Base and playing 1st Grade with the Colyton Chiefs. "I batted right handed so my left eye injury was always facing the Pitcher," said Craig. "I've no doubt it put quite a few of them off their game on the day."

Craig studied for and achieved his Certificate II and Certificate III in Commercial Cookery at Ryde TAFE and would later achieve a Diploma and Advanced Diploma in Hospitality Management.

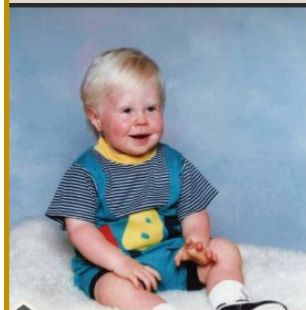
When he was 23, and living in Queensland, his family and friends noticed a change in behaviour, which he initially put down to being tired and stressed from working 40-50 hour weeks. His health ultimately led to a consultation and he was diagnosed with a brain tumour, which was described as being 'the size of a mango'.

He was put on a course of steroids, which resulted in his weight ballooning from 85-108kg. He suffered a bladder infection, followed by a fall and was in hospital for the next four months.

Unable to fly, Craig eventually was driven back to Sydney and he would remain bed-ridden for 12 months, struggling to come to grips with his blindness.

Vision Australia came to the rescue, instructing Craig in the use of a cane and also setting up both his phone and computer to talk to him.

Growing in confidence, Craig started going to the



Baby Craig



Sue, Craig, Amanda



Camp Quality



Craig cooking

gym and also undertook computer classes, determined to conquer the challenges of his disability.

On the business front, Craig served an apprenticeship at Mauriziou's in Wetherill Park, then went to work at Arthur's Restaurant in Kellyville, also working at that time in a cafe in North Sydney in the mornings.

Craig's burning desire was to own his own cafe, where he would be able to employ people of all disabilities.

Craig invested the bulk of his savings into renovations at the Blind Chef in 2019, only to have the Broker later deliver the chilling news the bank was no longer going to offer him a loan.

After months of stress and worry, the local NAB branch advised Craig they would approve his loan, flying the General Manager up from Melbourne to inspect the Cafe and approve the deal.

At the 11th hour, Australia was hit by the Covid epidemic and Craig's loan was again blown away by circumstance. His friends however rallied to his cause, starting a GoFundMe page to keep him afloat.

In September 2020, NAB came through with a loan for 50% of the required funds and once again, it was Craig's friends and others who rose to the occasion.

"The amount of people who helped with the fit-out of the Cafe was amazing, including tradespeople who put up their hands to work," said Craig.

In April 2021, the Blind Chef Cafe & Dessert Bar opened for business at the top end of High Street, Penrith and Craig was determined to work through the many and varied challenges he was still facing, one of which was his latest fight for survival.

In 2022, following the completion of the 7km Sun Run, Craig was listless and lacking energy.

He was subsequently diagnosed with Atrial Fibrillation, with his heart recording 200 beats / minute on an ECG test.

He received shock treatment to bring the heart back into normal rhythm and it would be a further 6 weeks before he saw his specialist.

His weight had ballooned to 115kg and was told his heart was now operating at approximately 16% capacity.

He was admitted to St Vincent's Hospital for 2 weeks, then would spend the next 7 months in and out of hospital and added to the transplant list.

A heart became available on 2nd December but fate hadn't finished playing tricks, as Craig was ill at that time with Covid.

Another donor heart became available on 10th January, 2023 and Craig received a heart transplant later that night.

He spent additional time in hospital due to a chest infection but fate was still mocking him, with his chef having recently left the business and the two new

appointees both declining to start work, virtually at the 11th hour.

The family stepped in and Sue and Amanda are now both working in the Cafe, with Sue progressing from 'Till Lady' to now knowing every job on the premises.

Antoine is now the chef, along with Emily the Pastry Cook, who was also away with Covid at the time of our interview.

"Everything is in the business," said Craig. "We do struggle with location but we receive wonderful support from the people in Penrith. We do meals for Rotary, Guide Dogs Australia, we've had the Luke Priddis Foundation Dinner, the members of the Chamber of Commerce are very supportive, I'm also a member of the Business Network Institute (BNI) and we are catering at the upcoming Disability Exhibition at the Penrith Valley Regional Sports Centre, Cambridge Park. We are catering for venues as far away as St Leonards."

Craig Shanahan was nominated as a Legend of the Nepean by Kerrie Davies.

If you know a local legend, send us a nomination at nepeannews@aol.com



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