



It would be amiss to write about the leading man at the Mallacoota RSL, without acknowledging the devastation the town has faced over the past six months, and the role Mark Tregellas and the Sub-Branch has played in resurrecting the remote seaside oasis.

The small town of Mallacoota, in Victoria's East Gippsland region, was on the map for all the wrong reasons. As the sky turned blood red on the cusp of the new year,

thousands of people huddled together at the Mallacoota foreshore. It was too late to leave, with the town surrounded by bushfire.

About 100 homes were destroyed and those who remained in Mallacoota were completely cut off. Just as we have seen throughout our history, the Australian Defence Force has played a critical role in assisting Australia's people during times of disaster and the recent bushfire season was no different, with HMAS Choules evacuating about 1400 people from the area.

With over 30 years in the Police Force, a Mallacoota resident for almost 20 years and 12 of those as the Mallacoota Sub-Branch President, Mark kicked into a higher gear. Like many who went above and beyond to help in various ways, Mark became known as the coordinator and facilitator of goods and services to those who had lost everything.

In the midst of the town making its come-back, albeit slowly, COVID-19 took its grip, shutting everything down once again. "It's probably been the hardest year that Mallacoota has ever had. The locals have been deeply affected by the twin tragedies."

"The RSL helped set up a community website to help coordinate the recovery after the fires. The website is a tool for community organisations to use to self-organise. And we've just taken possession of a new fire pit, which we hope can be used not just on memorial days, but community events – something to look forward to once Coronavirus restrictions are lifted."

That includes the annual ANZAC Day Dawn Service, which is Mark's most memorable accomplishment during his tenure. He says while there was no Dawn Service until he became President, it has been a welcome addition to the community, with up to 600 people in attendance. He says outcomes like these make his involvement with the RSL meaningful. "Interacting with the public and with those who have served in the past and present from all conflicts and listening to their comments of encouragement and thanks on ANZAC and Remembrance Days."

The former Army Reservist, who recently travelled to East Timor with his Regimental Association, says the RSL is as relevant and important now as it ever was. "I got to talk to current serving members and how Afghanistan, East Timor and Iraq had affected them. Talking to them just showed me their thoughts and sentiments of the RSL now."

It takes him back to some of his earliest childhood memories, which are linked to the RSL. "[I remember] as a five year old, standing on top of the old Gas and Fuel building on ANZAC Day at the corner of Flinders and Swanston Streets and watching my Grandfather who was in both World Wars.

I remember there were four Horsemen leading the march who were the last remaining members of the Light Horse.”

Despite the ongoing challenges facing Mallecoota, Mark remains motivated and determined to keep the Sub-Branch alive and well. “My endurance has allowed me to overcome obstacles in order to make certain that the memories of Australians who are not coming home are not forgotten.”