

# RSA struggles to retain rituals

by Sia Aston

Dwindling numbers of members who have served in conflicts overseas is making it tough for Returned Services Association and clubs to hold onto traditions.

"As the older members pass on, the younger ones come in. Most of them are more interested in the cheap drink than honouring those who fought for their country," says Avondale RSA president Neville Southey.

Avondale RSA still holds a nine o'clock remembrance, where all members stop and recite the oath, *We shall grow old*, and observe a one minute silence in honour of those who died during active service. But many other clubs have dropped the oath.

Ponsonby RSC's committee recently abandoned the traditional six o'clock remembrance because they had so few punters in, and of the few only one or two understood the reason for quoting the oath.

"We try and teach the kids, lest we forget, but there's no-one here to tell some days," says Ponsonby RSC committee member Rhonda Ryder.

"Anyway, most of the ones that do come in here are backpackers and a few local Pacific Islanders — they don't know what I'm going on about half the time."

All RSAs and clubs burn a light 24 hours a day next to the role of honour displayed with pride in each club's social room.

The role grows as each member who served in conflict passes away, and their name is then added to the list of those who went before them.

In the Ponsonby RSC, only two living members remain.

"We have space enough for the last two on the board and then that's it," says Ryder, who says she sometimes wonders who will remember them all when she goes.

But not all RSAs are struggling to find patrons.

The Pt Chevalier RSA, one of Auckland's largest, reports record membership numbers of nearly 2000 service and returned service members.

Deputy president Neville Swan explains that because there have been few conflicts attended by New Zealanders, there are fewer returned service



LEST WE FORGET: Roy O'Brien is president of the Pt Chevalier RSA — the largest in Auckland with 2000 members.

people now.

For this reason the Returned Service Association is becoming the Returned and Service Association, allowing free entry to those who have served overseas and those who have served at home, to bolster numbers.

In addition to armed forces personnel, members of the police and fire service are also now eligible for membership.

"We're losing too many of our members — they keep going off to heaven. But these others from the police and that, they are fully entitled to come here. We need them to support the club so that we can keep going," says Swan.

Swan says that while opening up to members who have not served in conflicts overseas means they may not fully understand the experiences of the returned service members, the new members still respect the

old ways and traditions of the RSA.

"Oh yeah, these guys may not have fought in the war like our World War Two boys, but they appreciate what the lads before them have done and they work pretty hard for their country too you know," he says.

Some patrons are not so happy about changes to the membership rules.

For what was once an exclusive club, it is pretty easy to get in and enjoy the discounted drinks and food.

All that a guest (associate) member is required to do is sign the book on entry and they are fully welcome to enjoy the club's cheap benefits.

Howick RSA member Arthur Plummer doesn't approve of opening up the clubs.

"I used to come in here to see all my old mates, lads who fought in the war. But nowadays

it's just about bloody anybody they let in here. Why should they get cheap beer? What did they do to deserve it?" he asks.

The move to broaden the membership criteria is of course a direct result of falling membership numbers, but some clubs have gone further to stay alive.

The Auckland RSA based in Newmarket has done away with clubrooms altogether in order to keep costs down.

"We sold the clubrooms some years ago and now we are 100% welfare-oriented," says club secretary and welfare manager Margaret Burke.

The club now uses membership funds to provide welfare for returned service people in the form of direct financial assistance, prescription glasses, dentures and help with getting war pensions.

"We'll even go out and buy a telly for some poor old fellow

who is lying in his bed all day without anything," says Burke.

The Auckland RSA has managed to stay afloat by avoiding the costs of clubroom maintenance and bar and food costs. Instead they have invested their money and they fundraise when the coffers are low.

Last Anzac Day the club raised \$36,000 with just a few voluntary members standing on Queen St and appealing to the public.

Burke says this is the only way they can survive, as previously decreasing membership numbers were crippling the club.

"I think in time they will all fold because the costs are too many and the members are dwindling.

"But we will remain, and we will continue helping the men and women who served for their country until they are all gone," says Burke.

## Discrimination means long-term refugee unemployment

by Peter James

A report released by the Government has found that more than two-thirds of refugees are unemployed after being in New Zealand for five years.

Professor Max Abbott, director of the AUT Centre for Asian and Migrant Health Research, says this figure is appalling.

"It's totally unacceptable and an appalling indictment on how we are handling refugee resettlement," he says.

The 'Refugee Voices' report is the result of a study on refugee resettlement conducted by the New Zealand Immigration Department.

The national director of the Refugee and Migrant Service, Peter Cotton, says that because of barriers such as language and culture, high unemployment levels for refugees are to be expected.

Cotton says current refugee arrivals will act as a "bridge" for future generations.

Of the Polish refugees who came to New Zealand in the 1940s, more than 60% of their children went on to tertiary education, he says.

Cotton says the children of refugees often grow up to be multilingual.

"I think that it's really important that we look beyond the

immediate," he says.

The 'Refugee Voices' report says that only 29% of "established refugees" — those who have been living in the country for about five years — are in the work force.

Professor Abbott says there are many factors that prevent refugees from finding work.

Such factors include language, mental health and employer prejudice.

"The thing about refugees is that they often have backgrounds of extreme trauma or torture," he says.

"Often their confidence is undermined."

Cotton says that non-English

speaking adult refugees find it especially hard to learn the language.

English classes are not always readily available.

The report found that only 50% of "established" refugees could speak English "well" or "very well".

Just 26% could speak only a few words or phrases.

Cotton says that refugees are often met with rejection in the job interview process.

"There is a lot of latent discrimination in terms of job opportunities," he says.

He says that refugees are rejected because they have the "wrong" names or accents.

The report found that 70% of "established" refugees had difficulties finding work in New Zealand.

The most common difficulties were English language problems and lack of work experience. Discrimination was also found to be a factor.

New Zealand accepts a quota of 750 refugees per year.

This number is bulked up by a further 200 to 500 refugees as part of the United Nations 1951 Convention.

The report says most New Zealand's refugees are from: Iraq, Somalia, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Burma, Iran and Sri Lanka.