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The aftermath of a recent fire in the Scenic Drive, rumoured to have been deliberately lit.



Arson

What drives people to deliberately light fires? PAGE 4>

Death blamed on police station

• Man hangs himself while in Echuca police custody

THE suicide of a Melbourne father in Echuca police custody may never have happened if calls for a new police station were listened to, according to Member for Rodney Paul Weller. Mr. Weller says he has been insisting a new police station be built for years,

without success. "If there had been a new police station that we've been asking for, this (would) never have happened," he said.

Last week, Doncaster man Stephen Niit, 45, hanged himself with his shirt after being picked up drunk

while walking his dog by an off duty police officer, who brought him to the station.

Police checked on the man 3 minutes after he entered the cell, and 15 minutes later he was dead.

Mr. Weller wants cells without hanging points in them. **Continued P3>**

FIX UP VIC PARK: Club's plea to council PAGE 2>

‘Anti-sport council’ blamed for Vic Park derelict

INSIDE STORY

FOR MANY months now, subtle things have continually decayed Victoria Park. The gradual build-up of bird poo on the grand stand, those pot holes getting larger by the day, the paint on the facility peeling off from the walls. These things, allegedly left unattended by council maintenance workers, are degrading Vic Park’s reputation as a pristine sports venue, says football coach Brett Henderson.

His concerns are continually ignored by the “anti sport” Campaspe Shire Council, he says. So he’s decided to publicise his message to the world. And what better way to vent his discord than to take to band waves of the internet, to set up a Facebook group.

‘Could council please fix up Vic Park’ reads the group’s title, and its membership is growing by the day, with over 300 on board.

Messages posted range from “(Vic Park) has the potential to be one of the best grounds in the Goulburn Valley but is being let down by an ‘anti sport’ council,” to “Hang your head in shame council- it’s getting worse daily!!!!”



Vic Park, as seen from the Grandstand.

Brett Henderson spoke with *The Times*, saying that the bad grounds may affect competitive sport played there.

“It’s becoming difficult to entice people to come to Echuca to play footy,” he said. “The facilities are pretty ordinary, compared to other venues. It’s quickly becoming an eyesore.”

He says that when you compare Vic Park to other regional facilities, “ours are somewhat a third world country.”

As for the council, he says, “There doesn’t seem to be any genuine concern at the moment.”

Although there is a Vic Park master plan tabled in council, that had Grande visions of a futuristic

sporting ground, the Mid-West Bridge may put a stop to that because it travels so close nearby.

“In the back of my mind, the Bridge might be the reason there’s no maintenance,” Brett said.

However Councillor Neil Repacholi says that action is being done.

He says a \$100,000 grant to resurface the oval and begin a water efficient drip system has been given by the Government. However when these things will be implemented remains a big mystery.

Cr. Repacholi responded to Brett’s arguments by saying that things will get better.

“I do agree with him, but action is being done,” he said.

Police station causes suicide

Briefly...

From Page 1>

However a Victoria Police source told *The Times* that there will now be an inspection of Echuca's cells.

The cell is an old model that has since been phased out across most of the state, however Echuca's has not yet been upgraded.

"Victoria Police has completed a significant amount of work around increasing the safety in cells, in particular removing hanging points and any other physical structures that may pose a risk to prisoners," the source said.

Although this was not the case in Echuca. It was the second death in police custody in 48 hours, with a man dying in a police divisional van after being sprayed with capsicum spray.

An investigation is now being undertaken into the incident, to be overseen by the Coroner and Ethical Standards Department.

Mr. Weller said he could not blame the Government or police for this incident.

"Deaths in custody, nobody wants. Police carry out their duties to the best of their abilities," he said.

"When people come into custody police have a duty of care to uphold and we take that very seriously," the source said. CCTV cameras have now been



introduced into most cells and there are regular audits to make sure prisoners are treated properly.

"All Police Service Area Managers have the responsibility of ensuring their respective cells are regularly monitored and any potential threat that is identified is removed immediately."

Lisa Niit issued a statement saying she was devastated by the loss of her husband. Their 19 year old daughter was in Echuca when the death occurred.

"Stephen was a wonderful father, husband and friend, who will be missed," she said.

The Niit family this week travelled to Echuca to collect the body.

Mr. Weller said he hopes this incident will never happen again.

Street

- CONCERNS over the decay of Vic Park have been flicked off by Councillor Neil Repacholi, who says action is being done. Football coach Brett Henderson says that Vic Park's condition is getting worse daily and no maintenance is happening. A Facebook page has been set up to urge council to clean up the sports venue.

Local

- A MELBOURNE man has died in Echuca police custody. Stephen Niit, 45, from Doncaster was picked up and taken into custody last week for public drunkenness. He was taken into a cell and checked on 3 minutes later, however 15 minutes later he had hanged himself with his own T-shirt. There are now calls for the upgrade of the police station.

National

- NEW evidence has emerged in the disappearance of former PM Harold Holt, with tapes being released of testimonies from former governor-general Sir Paul Hasluck who said Holt may have been taking "pep pills" which left him over-confident when he entered the surf.

World

- THE CASE against private military contractor Blackwater, whose operatives allegedly shot dead 14 unarmed Iraqi civilians in 2007 has been thrown out by a US judge. Judge Ricardo Urbina said prosecutors violated the defendants rights by using evidence given under immunity.

The aftermath of a fire in
the Scenic Drive.

Arson: why people do it

WE'VE all seen the devastation bush fires can cause. Houses destroyed, livelihoods ruined, families ripped apart by loss.

During the Victorian Bushfires 11 months ago, it was discovered that the Churchill and Marysville fires were deliberately lit, which killed over 100 people. The perpetrators were arrested and are now jailed for a crime, some say, is worse than paedophilia.

This, however, has not deterred other arsonists from causing fires. In Rochester, a serial firebug has been plaguing the community and is said to have lit up to 20 separate fires, in the last two

months causing over \$500,000 damage. Even last Wednesday night, a fire was started in the Scenic Drive, rumoured to also be deliberately lit. The fire brigade is saying little, as it is now under investigation, but they say if they didn't control it as fast as they did, Crofton Street houses would have been at risk.

So what drives arsonists to light blazes, which could very well kill scores of people?

An Echuca psychologist says pyromania is a rare disorder; however those who have it light fires because it offers relief, pleasure and gratification to the arsonist and relieves tension and arousal.

The psychologist stresses she is not an expert in the pyromania field, however says that the Scenic Drive fire was possibly not lit by a pyromaniac, but perhaps a juvenile.

“(Pyromania) is possibly not the case in the fire here, it could have been a delinquent,” she says, however “If they were a pyromaniac, they could have got a true hit out of it,” regarding the strategic location of the fire in tinder dry bushland.

Pyromaniacs do not have any awareness when they light fires and it is classified as an impulse-control disorder.

It is a mental illness that requires psychological treatment.

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SPORT



Second and third canoeists to make it to Echuca congratulate each other after a close finish, while (below) *Dumb and Dumber* were first home and the police outrigger was not far behind.

Paddling, power and passion

PADDLERS drifted into Echuca this week, clearly exhausted, after paddling their 266th kilometre as part of the YMCA Murray River Marathon.

Some competitors celebrated the journey by jumping into the water at the finish line at the Vic Park boat ramp; others were too tired to lift their arms.

However the 750 competitors still have another 130km leg to go to finish the race. The team from *Dumb and Dumber* crossed the line first into Echuca however the local team *Yellow Speed Machine* was able to complete the leg fastest.

The next fastest was *Yarra Valley Grammar*, closely followed by *John Proctor*.

Victoria Police Chief Commissioner Simon Overland was meant to participate in a 6-man outrigger with other local



Police officers, however was forced to pull out because of a bout of gastro.

Temperatures have been soaring for most of the race, making it hard for many inter-state and international competitors.

The race ended on Thursday, with the eventual winner being Tony Hystek from Liscombe, NSW.

EDITORIAL

2010: Bring on the future



2010 always seemed like a distant sounding year, a year in the far-away future.

Sci-fi movies from the past had all kinds of crazy ideas as to what a 2010 world would be like. Would we be flying in cars? Would we have landed on Mars? Will we have a cure for cancer?

The answer, as we have now discovered, is no.

Thanks to a financial crisis and a Vietnamesque war in the Middle East, progress has remained relatively slow throughout the past decade, in terms of flying cars and Martian landings.

However the noughties, as they've been dubbed, was a decade of hardship and of immense change.

Of course, thanks to 9/11, and London, Madrid and Bali Bombings, which all tragically killed scores of

innocent people, the world changed. Trust no one, lock your houses up, stay alert was the mood. Even this week, we discovered how on edge we were with the "terrorist" scares on US-bound flights.

Although this is not a one-off. In times past, the world was on edge, just like they are today. Think of the Cold War and the threat of a nuclear Holocaust, Spanish Influenza and, of course, two world wars. In fact, compared to them, the noughties have been much calmer.

But in terms of technology, great leaps have been made and maybe even matched the visions of those Sci-fi films.

Think of Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Google and the wonders of a mobile phone.

Literally billions of people were communicating at once, sharing their information in a way we never would have imagined. So what can we expect in this next decade?

Probably much of the same: a prolonged Middle East war, perhaps shifting to Yemen, more drought and hardship here, deaths and marriages of the rich and famous – maybe even a royal wedding, petrol prices going up, a lack of water and food, more disasters and disease and probably a new Prime Minister.

The cycle of life will continue to rotate, as it has done for millennia before us, and although there may be some terrible things that happen now and then, life will always march on.

OPINION

Your views, your say, your Opinion

ODD BOX A London restaurant asked diners to sign a legal waiver before tucking in to their Christmas pudding in case they hurt themselves on the silver-coin charms inside. The owners of High Timber said they were advised to draw up the indemnity form by lawyers who regularly dine there

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

My theory is that all of Scottish cuisine is based on a dare.

Mike Myers

JOKE BY JAKE (Christmas bon-bon jokes)

What colour is a burp?
Burple.

How do you turn soup into gold? Add 24 carrots.

What do call a snowman with a tan? A puddle.

HOROSCOPE



YOU'RE just sitting down to eat dinner. You're really hungry and the meal smells nice. Just as you're about to dig in, the phone rings! Should you answer it? Should you leave it to message bank? Its one of life's great questions. A pet hate of mine is phones that don't get answered. Like in suspenseful movies, where they just stare at the phone for ages, where in real life the person calling would have hung up already. But what if it's important? What if there's an emergency? The funny thing is there never is an emergency. And you end up leaving your meal to answer a call from, let's say, a person from Guide Dogs Australia. Damn them!

“Are you looking forward to 2010 and the next decade?”



Al Gore

“No. We are all going to die and ITS ALL YOUR FAULT!”



Sci-fi geek

“Of course. Soon we'll have smellyvision and portable quantum generators for all!”



Kevin Rudd

“Yes! After I win the next election, my diabolical plan for world domination will be complete! Muhahaha ”

Critic's choice



Shaun Micallef's New Year's Rave

Channel 10, 10pm NYE

YOU'VE got to wonder what Shaun Micallef gets up to in his spare time. He is a very bizarre person, but still very funny. This week, we were invited into his 1950's style home for a "New Year's Rave," where it seemed anybody would drop by to join in on the show. Except Dave Hughes, as they pretended they weren't home when he knocked on the door. They had comedians, singers and Corey Worthington, who stopped by to complain about the noise they were making. Sports reporter Brad McEwan also was there, with Micallef giving him a grilling interview about sports in 2009, a subject he knows little about. Charlie Pickering, Amanda Keller, Tony Martin, Jolene Anderson and Amy Pearson also joined in for the show, which was full of laughs. The fireworks display was less than impressive, as the show was actually not live, as it made out to be. But for all those bored people on New Year's Eve, this was a good bit of entertainment for a usually dreary evening.

"Malcolm in the Middle"

I DON'T know if it would be strangely fun or tiresome if living in a family as dysfunctional as Malcolm's. It looks like fun, but I guess it's because we're laughing at their expense.

Besides who would want to live in a house with a scary mum like Lois?

But I like *Malcolm in the Middle* because it's the complete opposite of every "happy family" show on Channel 7. Take *Packed to the Rafters* or *Brothers and Sisters* for example. Everything is so dreary, the plotlines so boring. Someone gets married. Someone spits up. Someone has a baby. Same old, same old.

But not on *Malcolm*. They fight with their neighbours and their friends and most often each other. It's like a real life version of *The Simpsons*, if not slightly more believable.

They don't do loving and caring. Especially when they steal money from each other and hide accidents that they've created. The dad, Hal, is usually on the side of his kids – but won't admit to it. Francis, the oldest son, has been sent to Military school, but is grateful to be away from his family. Reese hits people, while Dewey, the youngest is usually at the butt of their accidents. Malcolm, the middle child, is actually a genius, although this gift gives him self awareness of his family, which is probably a bad thing.

However everything usually ends up all right, because, well, the strength of family ties is only exposed when they're tested.

