

BUSINESS BEAT

Making Geelong accessible



LOCATING the national headquarters of the Federal Government's National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) in Geelong has brought a new and exciting dimension to our region.

Few may realise just what an important role Geelong people played in making the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), administered by NDIA, a reality.

Those who actively lobbied and campaigned for change will recall the "Every Australian Counts" campaign that was a catalyst to the establishment of the NDIS.

Scores of local people banded together and fought tirelessly to ensure that the NDIS came to fruition, and that Geelong was included as one of the initial trial sites.

The construction of a new multi-level building to house NDIA and the federal Department of Human Services, is yet



HUGE BENEFIT: The NDIA headquarters is one of many moving to Geelong, like this development for WorkSafe at 1-7 Malop St.

another vote of confidence. That the Federal Government has chosen to co-locate these two offices here is testament to the collective advocacy of many, and to the

recognition of Geelong as a viable alternative to capital city expansion.

The NDIA building will house about 1000 employees. The impact on trading and

business in central Geelong will be huge.

Add to this, the soon-to-be-constructed WorkSafe building, expected to house up to 700 staff, and it is clear that

central Geelong will soon experience a renaissance, with a rapid injection of people — good news for battle-weary small business operators.

At a recent meeting with senior executives at NDIA, discussion focused on the new opportunities that would emerge for Geelong as it builds upon its strengths as a centre for insurance and disability services.

However, if we are to truly "walk the talk", Geelong needs to not only embrace these emerging sectors, but to become an exemplar city.

Imagine if Geelong was known as the most accessible city in Australia? Imagine the tourism potential that would bring?

People with a disability, like those without a disability, often travel with friends and family. It makes good business sense for tourism, accommodation and hospitality businesses to be open and accessible to individuals, as well as groups that may include a person with a disability.

This concept applies equally to all businesses, including retail and professional services.

If Geelong was known as the most accessible city in Aus-

tralia, imagine the professional talent that may be attracted to Geelong, which for too long has lost skilled, professionals to the major capital cities. Such a vision is not only about being inclusive for people with a disability, though.

There are many in our community who may have mobility or other issues that impact on their ability to access services, such as the elderly, people suffering from illnesses and parents navigating through the city with infants in prams.

If Geelong is to truly embrace its new direction, and "walk the talk" then everyone needs to get behind the NDIA's vision for Geelong as a beacon for accessibility.

To do nothing is not an option. Geelong is now well and truly on a trajectory of greatness and can be a shining example to the rest of Australia, and indeed the world.

Locally, the Disability Field Officer Service is working with businesses to develop increased opportunities for the employment of people with a disability in their workplaces.

For more information, visit: www.geelongchamber.com.au