

MEET THE MEMBERS

Mabel and Ron Greer of Croydon

You can take the boy out of Ireland but you can't take the Irish out of the boy - or girl. Ron and Mabel still have that lovely Irish lilt that portrays their origins. Ron grew up in a rural area in County Sligo, where his parents ran the local general store. Mabel was a farmer's daughter from Donegal and met Ron in Sligo.

Ron does not look back on his school days with fond memories. He attended the local village school in Primary but, due to many unqualified teachers, he was not adequately prepared for Secondary school. Having to board away from home at Sligo Grammar didn't help. He was apprenticed to a grocer with the aim of returning to take over the family business but this didn't eventuate. After becoming a manager in five years, Ron felt the need to do something different and successfully applied to Cadbury's in Dublin.

He must have also found something different when he met Mabel, who was working in the hospitality area at the time. After "going out" for three years, they moved to Limerick, where they lived for several years. Ireland was not a happy place to live at this time, with the Civil Rights activities, entry into the Common Market and doom and gloom everywhere. Ron could see no prospects for the future, so applied for a transfer with Cadbury to Australia. The couple, with their fifteen month old son, Douglas, travelled to Australia on the "Brittanais." They thoroughly enjoyed the trip as far as Capetown, then between there and Fremantle they endured two weeks of extremely rough seas. Mabel still turns green just remembering it. The Greers have no regrets at having made such a major move in their lives. Mabel was very homesick at first but her sister moved out and settled in nearby Croydon. She has also made several return trips to Ireland, where she still has a brother.

Mabel retired recently after 31 and a half years with Safeway. She doesn't miss working but does miss the contact with friends in the workplace. She has kept in touch with a few of them through regular meetings for coffee and a chat. Her fitness regime has included a daily walk with Bernie Martyn, who just lives a couple of houses away. Her other passion is gardening, and their lovely garden certainly bears witness to this.

Ron continued to work for Cadbury's until 1998. He freelanced for a time and then joined a company called Eat-Rite. This was fine for a while and he even became the National Sales Manager but Ron grew tired of travelling to Brooklyn, where the office was situated. After a short stint with the Grey Army, Ron did not want to go into a franchised business so he struck out on his own again. He finds his present work, as a home handyman/ maintenance person, quite demanding but very satisfying. (He was difficult to pin down for an interview as he is so much in demand.) Ron has always been good with his hands and they even built the home they presently live in. This skill has been passed on to their son who made the beautiful aquarium cabinet that sits proudly in their lounge room.

Ron has done a lot of sailing over the years, starting his interest while still in Ireland. Caravanning is another of their loves. They commenced their camping adventures with a tent and have now been caravanning for over thirty years. They both carry vivid memories of a scary incident in Mildura in the early years. One night, at about 9 o'clock, a fierce storm struck the camping area. It was extremely ferocious and they spent the whole night holding up the tent. Incredibly, some of the campers slept through the whole adventure. Ron and Mabel decided to move to Swan Hill to escape the aftermath of the storm. Would you believe it - the storm followed them! They decided it was time to buy a caravan.

On another occasion they were at Mt Beauty with friends after Christmas, a favourite haunt of theirs. Storms were a common occurrence but one year the storm was very bad and a tree in the camp was hit by lightning. Everyone was rounded up and taken to the place that afforded the best protection - the toilets.

Ron and Mabel talked very proudly of their friend, the Irish singer Daniel O'Donnell. They were originally friendly with Daniel's sister, Mary, also a singer of some renown in Ireland. They first knew Daniel as a young boy and Daniel can still remember going into the Greer family shop. Ron and Mabel catch up with him quite regularly when he comes to Melbourne for concerts and often go out to dinner with him. On one occasion they decided to go Chinese. Ron asked Daniel if he was comfortable with chopsticks and Daniel replied that in Ireland they were just getting used to knives and forks. Ron was tickled by the nifty dance routines which Daniel had included in his recent performances here.

John Martyn was responsible for alerting Ron and Mabel to the then new Ringwood Clocktower Probus Club and they are fully enjoying their contact with other members of the Club. They particularly love the caravanning weekends, which they describe

as "something special." They have also become regular attendees at the "Great Movies of Yesteryear" nostalgia DVD nights. Why does Ron usually sit in the back row? To have a snooze, perhaps? They appreciate making new friends and Mabel is especially pleased that the Club is so friendly and "not cliquey." In fact, according to Mabel, "as the club goes on, it keeps getting better."