



MEDIA RELEASE: FRIDAY, 25 JANUARY, 2019

Southern Aurora carriage delivered to Violet Town in preparation for 50th anniversary of Southern Aurora train crash

Violet Town recently welcomed the delivery of an old Southern Aurora Train carriage in preparation for the 50th anniversary of the Southern Aurora train crash on 7th February.

The carriage now sits centre stage in the Southern Aurora Memorial Garden which is nearing completion and will be officially launched at a commemorative event held from 7th-10th February in Violet Town.

Strathbogie Shire Council and the Southern Aurora Memorial Committee would like to thank V/Line, Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC), Over Dimensional Lift and Shift and Downer Group for their combined efforts in transporting and installing the carriage.

On the 7th February 1969 approximately 1km South of Violet Town, in the heart of North East Victoria, the Southern Aurora overnight express service from Sydney to Melbourne collided head on with a freight train travelling in the opposite direction shortly after 7am.

Nine people died, and 120 were injured in the burning entanglement of the high-speed crash.

It was the townspeople of Violet Town, the district and the local emergency services who were pivotal in helping those still living to escape the train wreckage. They held the fire at bay, smashed windows and pulled passengers to safety.

Nearly 50 years on, many long-time residents of Violet Town still vividly remember the fateful day.

The gardens and commemorative event have come about as a result of the hard work of a group of locals who have formed a committee to respectfully acknowledge the tragedy.

Southern Aurora Memorial Committee member and local historian, Bruce Cumming said the community welcomes one and all to attend the commemorative weekend.

"Violet Town and the surrounding districts and communities are keen to commemorate both the national significance of the disaster, but also the wonderful contributions of many good Samaritans from around Violet Town and the surrounding districts that helped in many ways to save lives and support people who needed assistance," Mr Cumming explained.

Mr Cumming said the four day event will commence with a vigil on Thursday 7th February at 7am at the crash site.

"The event will commence with a respectful vigil service at the crash site, so people can individually and collectively gather their thoughts and memories of the tragedy, and remember those who died, those who were injured physically and psychologically, and give thanks to those who bravely and generously did all they could to save lives."

The weekend will also involve a variety of art and museum exhibitions, a street parade of vintage emergency service vehicles, a free concert from the Choir of Hard Knocks and the well-known Violet Town Market, which has up to 250 stalls.

The weekend will conclude on Sunday with the official opening of the Southern Aurora Memorial Garden.

The Victorian Government has thrown its support behind the community, providing a \$150,000 contribution to the memorial gardens and event.

The Federal Government have also contributed \$13,000 towards the project, as well as \$16,500 from ARTC and a \$20,000 contribution from V/Line.

The committee has also received significant support from Strathbogie Shire Council through a contribution of \$50,000, as well as a variety of in-kind and financial support from the local Violet Town community.

Strathbogie Shire Mayor Amanda McClaren said Council is honoured to support such an important commemorative event.

“The Southern Aurora Memorial Garden will acknowledge those whose lives were forever changed by this tragedy and its aftermath, and will serve as a reminder of the strength of community in overcoming adversity,” Cr McClaren said.

“We encourage anyone interested in attending to come along to the commemorative weekend in February to remember and honour the Southern Aurora train crash.”

For more information about the commemorative event, please visit www.southernauroraviolettown.com.au.

There are many individual stories out there that the Southern Aurora Memorial Committee is still piecing together and they would appreciate any information they can get relating to the crash.

If you have any information you'd like to share, please call Bruce Cumming on 0419 540 552.

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