

# Away from the blah-blah of mainstream radio, a band



## PUTTING A NEW SPIN ON THE CLASSICS

Pete Clemmens spins the discs at GDR 95.7fm. Pictures: Jason Edwards

### Robyn Riley

**T**hey are a band of unlikely radio stars. They include a banker, a former pilot and a neuroscientist – all of them brought together by a shared love of music from a bygone era.

These former high-flyers are now flying high on the airwaves of community radio GDR 95.7fm in Glen Huntly, known to its 75,000 listeners as Golden Days Radio.

From Melbourne to Montevideo – and many other places around the globe – listeners tune in to hear “yesterday’s music today” delivered by 80 passionate presenters and support crew – volunteers, mostly retired, who give their time to keep the station rolling along.

The oldest DJ is Jack Saunderson, 91, the youngest is Dominic La Rocca, 28, and behind the reception desk is Keith Irvine, a former Coles-Myer company secretary and ex-president of the Epworth Hospital board.

### LARRY JAMES, 72 PRESENTER FRIDAY BREAKFAST

Former ANZ branch manager Larry James is the station manager, program manager and a former president of GDR 95.7fm.

He has been a volunteer since he retired 20 years ago. “A friend told me to listen in, one day,” Mr James says. “I did, and I loved it. I rang and asked if I could be a presenter and was told to ‘join the queue.’”

Laughter reverberates around the boardroom table because it’s a familiar story.

The volunteer presenters are blessed with beautifully modulated voices, pitch-perfect for the airwaves – but they also had to wait their turn due to the popularity of the role.

Mr James gives about 40 hours a week to the station. “I love it, it’s a lot of fun and it keeps me young,” he says.

### HEATHER SWIFT, 87 GENERAL DUTIES AND FUNDRAISER

The self-funded station is supported through sponsorships, memberships and by people such as Heather Swift, who wrote a cookbook to help bring in some extra money.

She was a presenter for 20 years but hung up the microphone because of eye trouble.

“I do desk duties and catering now,” Mrs Swift says.

“What ever is happening, if it needs someone to do it, I’m here.”

Back in the day, she was the home economist responsible for keeping an eye on things nationally when Coles had cafeterias, restaurants and

snack bars. “I travelled all around Australia, finding out what was needed in the way of improvement,” she says.

### JOHN ‘JACK’ SAUNDERSON, 91 BREAKFAST PRESENTER SUNDAYS

The elder statesman of this merry band, Jack Saunderson is a former RAAF radio technician who became an engineer and worked in telecommunications.

Like many of his “station mates”, he started his media career as a volunteer at Vision Australia Radio, reading the newspapers on Monday mornings.

Soprano Joan Sutherland is his favourite singer along with prominent artists from the 1950s and ‘60s.

“They’re trying to force me into the 1970s,” he smiles.

### IAN McLEOD, 83 PRESENTER WEDNESDAYS 6PM TO 10PM

“I was a projectionist at the local cinema when I was younger and that developed my passion for film musicals,” says Ian McLeod, the station’s president.

His first “real job” was as a sportswear buyer for the Myer Emporium and later he had his own menswear agency. He also had his own manufacturing and retail business before



becoming a director of a community bank.

“We’re not just a community radio station, we’re a family of dedicated, talented and like-minded people giving back to the community,” Mr McLeod says.

### PETER THOMAS, 81 MONDAYS NOON TO 3PM

From the moment he speaks, you know Peter Thomas has been professionally trained.

He’s a graduate of the famed Hector Crawford School of Broadcasting – the production powerhouse that produced hundreds of Australian actors and radio presenters for more than 50 years.

Mr Thomas’s training paid dividends when he got his

first radio job at 2AY in Albury. He also worked in regional TV and eventually moved to Melbourne where he started a television production company.

He joined the crew at Golden Days of Radio 12 years ago.

“It’s more community-oriented, it has high standards, but they are more about serving the community,” Mr Thomas says. “That’s what community radio is.”

### LORETTA SIMMONS, 81 SATURDAYS 12 TO 3PM

The multifaceted Loretta Simmons has dined with US diplomats (think Henry Kissinger) and met with billionaires (with the surname Rockefeller).

“I’m a presenter and a general factotum, really, because I do some sponsorship requests, I write a lot of letters out to, hopefully, potential sponsors,” she says.

“Before I retired, I worked for a diamond mining company as the personal assistant and executive assistant to the chairman, the board and the chief executive.

“It was an exciting, international role.

“My job was to liaise with fund managers and bankers and politicians and visiting dignitaries from overseas.”

Now the station takes much of Ms Simmons’ time.

“I heard Freddy Gardner playing Body and Soul – he was a great saxophonist – and