

A Warm Welcome, A Simple Coffee — And a Lifeline for Families Living with Dementia

In Emerald something quietly powerful is taking shape — a place where conversation flows easily, laughter comes naturally, and no one has to explain themselves.

The newly launched **Golden Hour Café**, an initiative of the Rotary Club of Emerald and District, is more than just a coffee catch-up. It is a purposeful space for people living with dementia and their partners to reconnect with community, rediscover joy, and simply feel understood.

Opening its doors on 6 May, and utilising the Emerald RSL facilities, the café will operate on the first and third Wednesday of each month from 10am to 12 noon, offering a welcoming and supportive environment built around connection, dignity and shared experience. For many families navigating the daily challenges of dementia, opportunities like this are rare — and deeply needed.

Behind the initiative is a clear and compassionate vision: to ensure that those living with dementia — and those who care for them — remain socially connected, engaged and supported within their own community.

The café has been developed by the Rotary Club of Emerald and District in collaboration with Umbrella Dementia Cafes, a national leader in creating safe, inclusive spaces for people impacted by dementia. Their proven model focuses on small, consistent groups, trained volunteers, and meaningful engagement tailored to each individual's needs.

Sessions are thoughtfully structured to balance familiarity and stimulation. The first hour centres around coffee, conversation and connection — celebrating birthdays, sharing stories and easing into the morning. The second hour shifts to activities shaped by the interests of the group, from music and games to crafts, puzzles or even themed experiences.

Importantly, the café operates on a membership basis, allowing participants to build relationships over time in a consistent and supportive setting. This continuity is vital for people living with dementia, where familiarity can significantly enhance comfort and confidence.

For carers and partners, the benefits are equally profound.

“Caring for someone with dementia can be isolating,” Kristine Ash, Café Facilitator explained. “This café gives both the person living with dementia and their carer a chance to reconnect — not just with each other, but with others who understand what they’re going through.”

The Golden Hour Café also reflects a broader shift in how communities are responding to dementia — moving away from clinical settings and towards inclusive, community-based support.

With dementia now one of Australia's most significant health challenges — and numbers expected to rise sharply in the coming decades — grassroots initiatives like this are becoming increasingly important.

In Cardinia Shire alone, the number of people living with dementia is projected to grow significantly over the next 30 years, placing greater demand on families, services and local support networks.

For the Rotary Club, the café is a natural extension of its commitment to community service. The club is very grateful for the funding support the café has received from Falcone and Adams, Thats Right Bookkeeping, OrgMent Business Solutions, the Cardinia Community Foundation and from Rotary District 9815. The club is also grateful to Emerald RSL for making their facilities available. This is truly an example of collaboration working to make a difference.

The café also provides an opportunity to engage volunteers in meaningful, hands-on support. Volunteers from Rotary and the community receive specialised training from Umbrella Dementia Cafés and Dementia Training Australia and work in close ratios with participants, ensuring each person feels safe, supported and included.

There is also a quiet but powerful secondary impact — breaking down stigma.

By bringing dementia into a warm, social setting, the Golden Hour Café helps shift perceptions, reminding the community that those living with dementia are still active, valuable and deserving of connection and joy.

As the first sessions begin, there is a sense of anticipation — and hope.

For some, it will be a welcome outing.

For others, a much-needed support network.

And for many, it may become something far more meaningful. ***A place to belong.***

For more information go to <https://www.emeraldrotary.org.au/page/rotary-golden-hour-cafe> or contact Kris on 0412 399 001 she would love to chat with you and explain how it all works.