

GANG GREEN

THE 40-YEARS CLUB!

These distinguished gentlemen have all reached, or will soon reach, the milestone of 40 years of ambulance service. What attracted them? And what's kept them on the ambulance journey for all these years?



Terry Whales



Dave and Terry, in shorts!



Dave Schilling

FROM HOBBY TO CAREER

When the new power stretchers arrive, they'll hold special significance for Terry Whales. He will have been in the ambulance field from "when we carried stretchers through to not having to lift stretchers."

Looking back on 40 years of service, Terry, now the Operations Manager for Murray Mallee, counts himself fortunate to have turned a teenage hobby as a St John ambulance cadet into a career.

"I was sixteen when the organisation advertised for a junior ambulance officer position," he says. "Unfortunately ... I was deemed too young. The same position became available only six months later, when I was offered the position without application."

Back then, fellow 40-years-club member David Schilling was an apprentice mechanic in the ambulance workshop. They became friends and remain so.

It was a time of hats and ties for ambos and calling the boss 'Sir'. In Terry's words, the ambulance service was a "grab and go" affair rather than providing high-level clinical care.

So he's enjoyed seeing the service professionalise and filling a range of roles, including time as a regional general manager.

But being an ambo has meant sacrifices, including inevitably missing some special family times because of shift work.

"I have been very fortunate to have my wife of 35 years and my two children, who are so understanding," says Terry.

"And I say 'thank you' to them for allowing me to have had such a wonderful time during my working life in SAAS."

I WANT TO BE AN AMBO

As a boy, David Schilling wanted to be an ambo like his dad. Even his stint as a mechanic at St John's Hindmarsh station in the 1970s was a step towards his dream job.

"In those days, you couldn't be a full-time ambo until you were 21," says Dave. "So I was filling in time."

He'd volunteered with St John since 1969 as a cadet, was on an ambulance as a volunteer from 1973, and then out on the road as a full-time ambulance officer in 1980.

He doesn't even remember doing any training for his new paid role.

"I had a swag of experience already by then," says Dave. "There was no qualification attached to it. No pass marks or assessment."

One part of the job he can't believe past officers had to do was carrying decomposed or mutilated bodies, a ghoulis task they did up until 1979.

"Hindmarsh was the main station, and there was a steel coffin we used," he says.

"We'd wash the decomposed bodies and maggots in the wash bay where you washed the ambulance and everything."

One day he was tasked to a grisly job at a railway line.

"We'd went down to the tracks with a shovel and pick up a bit and put it in the coffin and pick up another bit and put it in."

After 40 years, "the unknown" still keeps Dave interested in the ambulance field.

"You don't know when you're going to go and where you're going to go," he says. "Sometimes you don't even know how you're going to get there!"



Gary Wyld



Gary's old ID.



Jon Jaensch



Jon in St John circa 1978.

HOT SUMMER AMBO

It was a sweaty December day in 1975 when Gary Wyld realised he'd had it with welding and wanted to become an ambo.

The 22-year-old sheet-metal tradie already volunteered at St John's Port Adelaide Division. So he knew what he was in for "rocking up to Hindmarsh Station and straight into training on the top floor".

Now a paramedic at Millicent (after a long recent stint as a regional team leader and time in the EOC, 'Comms', in the mid-1980s), Gary still remembers the sights and sounds of SA's ambulance past – some of them are even still with us!

"I do smile when I do a shift at Naracoorte these days and visit the gents toilet that hasn't changed in sight or deodoriser scent from 1976!" he says.

Major changes have been in staffing, the split with St John in the early 1990s and clinical development and equipment – including an end, in the 1980s, to the ergonomic nightmare of "double carries in a panel van ambulance with the patients being attended to over the front bench seat".

"Early on you could go anywhere and do almost anything in this vocation," he says. "It was a happy place to work, full of young ambos who were just a little bit mischievous at times and didn't take themselves too seriously."

Gary's achievements include representing country ambos as an AEA state councillor and his input into driver training programs.

Today, he's happy to be a paramedic and then disappear into his veggie patch on days off.

"I have an interest in seeing the youngsters coming through now getting amongst it, taking on roles that us oldies have held," he says.

"The next 10 to 20 years is their time to leave their mark."

CARING FOR THE LOVE OF IT

Car crashes were half the workload when Jon Jaensch first donned white overalls and jumped into a St John ambulance at Yankalilla in 1976. Today they're around five per cent.

"People were ejected from cars a lot more," says Jon. "They didn't wear seatbelts as much."

"And the road surfaces have improved dramatically. There are steel barriers on the sides of the road, so people don't go into the bushes like they used to!"

Volunteering in Jon's early days meant being near a landline phone when on call – no mobiles or pagers.

"It was a bit more restrictive," he says. "Mind you, it wasn't as busy. You could go for months without getting a job."

"Certainly our skill level and knowledge has increased – but the basics have remained the same."

Later on, volunteers even managed the station's financial affairs, including sending out transport accounts and subscription notices.

In addition to helping countless sick or injured people, Jon's been heavily involved with training new members. He is the current VTL and a member of SAASVHAC (and previously of the former Country Ambulance Service Advisory Committee).

Jon's still keen to keep helping his community as long as he can.

"I like helping people," he says. "While my health allows me to do it, I will continue doing what I'm doing."

"I think it's really special being a volunteer for something as important as ambulance. It would be a sad day if there weren't ambulance volunteers."

Do you know someone who you think should be featured in Gang Green?

If so, drop us a line at healthsaasnews@sa.gov.au