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Listed: Meet the innovative business women of the Murraylands

Dominating the manufacturing industry, thriving through floods and launching unique bookstores – these Murraylands women are making moves in the business world.

Dylan Hogarth [Follow](#)

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Some of The Murraylands' most impressive women in business.

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From entrepreneurs and women who are dominating in large-scale manufacturing to launching niche bookshops and bringing new food to the region, Murraylands women are making moves in the business world.

These are the stories behind seven of the region's most inspiring and innovative women in business.

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Local store owner Renae Seekamp in her Mannum. NCA NewsWire / David Mariuz

Renae Seekamp's business story has been one of total resilience in the face of adversity.

Her popular Mannum clothing and jewellery store Frankie and Calla had always been a hit with the locals and travellers alike as the town's Randell St swelled with visitors up enjoying the River Murray.

However, it was that very drawcard to the region – the river – which would throw Renae's trading into disarray.

Her shop was right in the recent River Murray flood path and she soon learnt in December 2022 there would be nothing that could save it from total inundation.

She was left with two options; board up the doors and watch as the water decimated her business or pack-up, move to higher ground and continue to trade.

Renae was too determined to throw in the towel and chose the latter, she rented out space on top of the hill and continued to operate her business, despite the risks.

She could not be sure power would remain on given the outages due to the flooding.

Foot traffic would be down anyway with no recreational access to the river and she would be taking on new costs by renting a new space.

However, she was not deterred and her business was not just surviving but thriving.

“We’ve been really busy and had a lot of support both locally and with our returning customer base,” Renae said.

“Our figures are actually above last year.”

Renae continues to trade from the rental while the original location, destroyed by the floodwaters, will be knocked down and a new home for Frankie and Calla will be built.

“We’ll have a brand new shop, and that is exciting,” she said.

“We are hoping to be in our new shop by Christmas time – we’ve got our builders ready and council approval has been done.”

JODIE HAWKES



Bowhill Engineering chief financial officer Jodie Hawkes.

Jodie Hawkes is the figurehead of not only her industry-leading Murraylands steel fabrication business, but a passionate leader in building strong communities where locals thrive.

In her own words, she is “radically honest and rebellious” in her pursuit of creating resilience in business in the region and fostering pathways for locals to shine.

Jodie is the co-owner and chief financial officer of a large nationally-renowned manufacturing business – Bowhill Engineering – located in a tiny town on the Murray.

The business is family-owned and operated with roots as a small rural machinery maintenance, repair and workshop.

Today, the company is responsible for an impressive resume of massive projects across the country.

It employs more than 60 full-time staff and has helped more than 40 trainees and apprentices complete their certificates and become fully qualified.

“We work really hard towards being an employer of choice and we like to grow our own, meaning that they’ve come from the region and give back to the region and start families and their kids go to school in the region,” Jodie said.

The company is responsible for a lot of well-known projects, but early work [building river ferries](#) remains some of her favourite projects as they were “built by locals for locals”.

“That was a long time ago and we’ve been building a lot of bridges since then, I think we are up to 25 ... we’ve been doing work on the Sydney Gateway and we’ve done some mining work this year, so we are trying to get our diversity up,” she said.

“We are tapping our toe in the waters of defence work, we are very busy and there’s a lot going on.”

Jodie takes her leadership talents beyond her business and was appointed Regional Development Australia Murraylands and Riverland chair in 2021.

She said she was passionate about the region and enjoys advocating for regional living and working.

“We are going through a transition phase where we are developing our new strategic plan and we are doing it a little differently and it is making a few people uncomfortable because we are going outside the box,” she said.

“But I believe it’s inspirational and that’s how change really does happen – we’re not doing what we’ve always done and see if we can make some headway from listening to the voices of our people a bit more.

“It doesn’t matter how much new stuff you bring with it, it might not survive or thrive without that core foundation.

“We are thinking outside the box and I am radically honest and rebellious in it.”

KERRY SWAN





Murraylands business woman Kerry Swan.

If you ask Meningie business woman Kerry Swan, she will tell you heartfelt leadership is the key to operating a successful business.

Kerry is a project manager by trade and an entrepreneurial trailblazer.

Her working life began at 16 with a government traineeship in administration moving into project management, developing the skills which saw her take a leap into a role at Murraylands Regional Development Board.

She soon started her own consulting business and eventually built a real estate business from scratch.

Now, she has a number of diverse business interests from earthmoving to property management, from fertiliser sales to farming.

“All along the way the thing that held me in good stead was the project management skills I developed in my 20s,” Kerry said.

She leapt into real estate after deciding to get her real estate licence to help her family manage commercial property interests and the move coincided with a major project in the region.

“It was when The Bend (Motorsport Park) was gearing up and I saw a gap in the market for what we call serviced accommodation,” she said.

“We knew there would be a bunch of workers when they built the track but then later on, the region was under serviced in terms of accommodation.”

With the serviced accommodation venture came property management and sales for her business, Coorong Realty.

“Covid really hit the real estate business really hard ... a lot of our business was accommodation driven and so overnight a lot of work dried up, we spent weeks cancelling bookings left, right and centre and we weren't really sure how we were going to pay the bills,” Kerry said.

It was then Kerry and her husband branched out into another business venture, buying an earthmoving business and associated quarries and equipment.

“In the three years since we bought it, we've reformatted the business and secured a bunch of government contracts – it's been like a start-up but we bought the foundation of an existing business.”

Kerry then quickly began developing what is the Swan Group, looking after her real estate, earthmoving, fertiliser and farming businesses.

While internal business management keeps her busy, her passion for personal development inspired Kerry to write and publishing a book.

“The book, Heartfelt Leadership was written during the Covid period and it was an opportunity to share my learning through my project management journey,” she said.

“It is a practical book for managers about how to get the best out of your team.

“It’s also got some elements that are a little more philosophical around creating the life that you want and how you go after that.”

KELLY JOHNSON



Woodlane Orchid founder Kelly Johnson.

Kelly Johnson’s business success started with a hunt for the solution to a problem.

The Murraylands woman said she had returned home to the Mypolonga region, an area famous for its citrus growers operating on the banks of the river.

Kelly said she was struggling to the right fit for her workwise in the region with her skill set but noticed a problem that she could potentially turn into an opportunity.

“I looked around and saw a lot of surplus produce going to waste and I thought, ‘what can I do about this,’” she said.

She said noticed surplus stone fruit and citrus going to waste so she helped out by selling it at markets.

However, she had bolder plans for the produce and soon started creating meals and a soup range using what she could get her hands on from the local growers.

In 2019, her business Woodlane Orchard was born as she continued purchasing surplus and seconds, dehydrating it and creating soups, meals, snacks and garnishes.

Kelly said the demand for the meals had seen her expand operations, which now run out of a shared factory in Monarto South, and allowed the company to create new products.

She is set to introduce her Spiker products – hike meals that are lightweight, delicious and plant based – in collaboration with other young South Australian women entrepreneurs.

Kelly focuses on building relationships with local farmers and growers and takes great pride in getting creative with what she can get her hands on.

“Eggplant for example, I had some come up the driveway, surplus, ‘what could we do with it?’,” she said.

“I had never used it in my life but then I sit down and figure out what I can create, so dry it and start experimenting until I get the recipe right.

“Every single one of our meals has come about by a single produce coming and looking how we can value-add to that to move it on.”

BRITTANY SCHULZ



Brittany Schulz, founder of Fiction and Friction.

Brittany Shulz is the brainchild behind a unique and first-of-its-kind bookstore, the kind of specially offering you would not expect to find in rural SA.

Her foray into business was born out of a passion for the work of independent authors and romance books.

Fiction & Friction started as an online store in 2020, proudly claiming to be the first specialty bookstore of its kind dedicated to independently published books. Brittany has since opened a shop front in Murray Bridge.

“It was right in the thick of Covid ... there was a little bit of luck, but I gave it a crack,” she said.

“I was making bookish merch on Etsy, just little homemade things for books I was already reading, I loved them but the problem was the only place you could buy them was Amazon and back it was hard to get shipping to Australia and when you could, it was expensive and books got damaged.

“I thought to myself, if I could do this, would people be interested in it?”

Brittany started by contacting author friends met at signing events across the country.

“From the first time I did a release, I had 20 authors and 100 books from then, the business was entirely self-sufficient, I’d have a release and the orders would just keep coming in,” she said.

Brittany said business was booming but the most thrilling part was helping people discover books and genres.

She has also branched into hosting her author signing events to bring big names to the state.

“Adelaide missed out on a lot when these author events coming to Australia so I thought I’d try and bring them here,” she said.

“The first one I’m hosting is in September at the Adelaide Convention Centre with two international authors and the rest of them Australian independent authors with about 45 set to come.”

JESSICA EATON AND JESSICA DiPINTO

Jessica Eaton and Jessica DiPinto first formed a friendship in the horseracing industry and last year became business partners to bring something new to Murray Bridge.

Jockey Eaton and racing administrator Di Pinto teamed-up to launch Ponyboy – a frozen yoghurt and casual dining eatery.

The shop offers a DIY frozen yoghurt bar, thickshakes and a hot food menu featuring loaded fries with a menu that has continued to evolve.

Eaton said the motivation to venture into the hospitality space came from a desire to put “time and energy into a passion project that was separate to our full-time jobs with racehorses”.

“I moved to Murray Bridge over two years ago and it’s been an amazing place to live and work,” she said when the business launched.

“We wanted to bring something new, fun and exciting to Murray Bridge and we hope the local community will really embrace Ponyboy.”

Di Pinto has extensive experience in the hospitality scene.

“We’re proud of the fact Ponyboy is run by locals, for locals and we’re not just a big franchise from the city,” she said.

“Murray Bridge is a growing, thriving community and we want to grow and thrive with it.

“Frozen yoghurt is a healthy treat everyone can enjoy, especially when you can build it your way.”

DiPinto said the shop had enjoyed the support of the Murray Bridge locals but business was not without its challenges.

When the popular bakery next door shut its doors, foot traffic went down but the duo decided to take on the space and will reopen the doors this week.

DiPinto said the reopened bakery would bring a good coffee option to Murray Bridge, would work in conjunction with the Tailem Bend Bakery selling its savoury products plus bring the highly-acclaimed Jenny’s Bakery sweets from Adelaide to Murray Bridge.

CAROLINE PHILLIPS



Wynarka business woman Caroline Phillips.

Wynarka woman Caroline Phillips wears many hats. The mother-of-two is Karoonda East Murray Mayor, a member of multiple boards, runs a farming operation, an active member of community groups and is the director of her own business.

Her marketing consultancy business CP & Co provide services to clients predominantly in regional SA.

Last year, it grew to take on a trainee and continues to service regular clients in the tourism space where Caroline has industry experience, having worked in the South Australian Tourism Commission.

“I’m very passionate about the growth and development of regional areas so that thread feeds through in my own business but also what I do in my elected member work and the board work I do too,” she said.

Caroline’s board roles are varied; she’s on the board of Netball SA, Tourism Council, the Landscape Board and the Local Government Association of South Australia.

“I’m very passionate about providing a regional voice in some of those state positions ... seeing some of that work being able to impact in smaller regional areas is what keeps me motivated,” she said.

Caroline is president of the Mallee Districts Netball Club, a new club in 2023 born out of the [merger of the Karoonda and Peake football and netball clubs](#), where her driving goal making sure sport is available to the youth of the region.

When asked what motivated her to be an advocate for the region, Caroline said it was a passion for the community she lived in.

Caroline loves the farming lifestyle and living regionally and said living in the country should not limit people from reaching for their goals.

“I did some work a while ago trying to look at my values and my purpose and I think regional growth is absolutely where my heart is at so to be able to contribute in various ways is really rewarding,” she said.

“One of the things I push locally with young people is you have the ability to create your own opportunities and with Covid and work-from-home era, distance is no longer a boundary for a lot of what you want to do.”

KRISTINA HOLLOWAY



Kristina Holloway of Past Tense.

Kristina Holloway’s Murray Bridge business is often described as a “hidden gem” with a focus on holistic health and wellness principles and practices.

She is the owner of Past Tense, which has always offered massage, body treatments, spray tan, Vibro sauna and waxing, but it’s what Kristina has added to her services that makes her little business unique and innovative.

She has diversified from massage and beauty into other natural therapies.

“I do massage and beauty but recently I’ve had a focus on women’s facilitation circles and kids mindfulness,” Kristina said.

“Breathwork, meditation, that kind of thing.”

One of the programs she offers is Peaceful Kids, providing sessions and strategies for the health and wellbeing for children.

“It helps regulate and support kids with things that are going on,” she said.

“I feel with kids these days there is so much pressure on them and coping can be hard.

“Mindfulness can really help – there is a high need for these kinds of services down this way.”

Her work with children has been recently recognised with a Communities for Children Murraylands award and she said the new programs had provides safe, warm places for women and young people to talk about things they might not otherwise be able to.

Kristina has been in business for 19 years, bringing her work to Murray Bridge 11 years ago.

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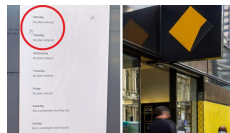
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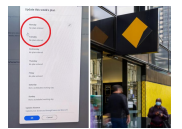
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