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Family reunited with memorial plaque

Former Hazelwood Power Station chemist, Val Myers, was a familiar figure riding around the site on her old bicycle to carry out chemical testing.

Val was one of a handful of women who broke new ground when she worked as an industrial chemist for Yallourn and then Hazelwood.

Sadly, she died 30 years ago at only 56 years of age, with a long career still ahead of her.

At the time of her death, Val was station chemist at Hazelwood and her colleagues raised funds to have a plaque created in her memory, planted in the garden at the front of the administration building. Her family, including husband Neil and daughters Dianne and Chris, were at the dedication.

Last week, they were back on site to be presented with the plaque.

“Mum lived for her work,” said Dianne who is also an industrial chemist. “She was recognised by everyone as she rode around on that bicycle. She mentored all the young trainees who fondly called her ‘mother’.

“You could always find her at local schools’ careers nights, talking about science to prospective students, especially the girls.”

One of those young technical officers who worked under Val was current Hazelwood employee, Dave Froud.

“Val was known for her support to the employment and development of women within the SECV,” Dave said. “She worked as a plant chemist before becoming station chemist. She led the team who carried out site monitoring, solved corrosion problems, produced boiler water and did some work with asbestos identification and counting as well as other routine testing.”

Val never stopped learning, according to Neil. “Even when she was walking from her Chem Lab to her car, she would have her nose in a book.”

There was never any question that a young Val would go to university.

“Her father believed women should be educated,” Dianne said. “Mum wanted to be a vet but the



family couldn't afford to send her to Sydney for the course . Mum and her brother both won scholarships to study science in Geelong."

Val worked as an industrial chemist until she met and married Neil. Together they ran a bakery in Hepburn Springs and later Daylesford.

They were bought out by a large Ballarat company and then moved to Moe where Neil went to work for the SECV at Yallourn. When her daughters were seven and five, Val returned to work as a chemist.

"Mum was so happy working at Hazelwood," Dianne said. "She loved going to work."

However not only was she the station chemist, she was also the "go to" for stray animals. Such was her fondness for animals that, together with Neil, she volunteered at the local RSPCA.

"Back in those days Hazelwood was overrun with stray cats," Dianne said. "Mum would round them up and take them to a friend who was a vet. Then they were found homes."

When Dianne read that Hazelwood Power Station would eventually be demolished, she contacted management to enquire about retrieving the plaque.

Hazelwood Facilities Manager, Bob Knight, did better than that. He organised for the plaque and its concrete mount be removed and presented to the family.

Neil Myers was overwhelmed. "It's going to take pride of place in the front garden of my Churchill home, next to a plaque from the family in Val's memory."

