



Manilla Cafe celebrates a great Aussie tradition



CAFE CELEBRATION: Manilla's Canberra Cafe, and its owner Paul Calokerinos, are celebrating 63 years in business this year.

A QUIET Manilla Cafe, which for many provides a nostalgic escape to an era of hand cut chips, personalised service and double-malted milkshakes is about to celebrate a significant milestone.

The Canberra Cafe, a shop-front stalwart of Manilla's main street, celebrates its 63rd year and to mark the occasion, the Cafe's long-time owner Paul Calokerinos has some big visions.

One of the last true Greek cafes in the region, the Canberra still maintains all the hallmarks of the era when every country town had one.

Among the festivities to mark the longevity of the cafe and its Greek heritage will be a special function outside the shop on Easter Sunday (March 31), where in front of a number of invited special guests and members of the public, he will unveil some of the restorations that have taken place inside the cafe over the past six or more months.

Those renovations, for Mr Calokerinos, were about taking the building back to its original state, and making it feel more like the “olden days”.

He says, apart from modernising the shop front in the 1970s, not much has changed in the days since he bought the business in partnership with his cousin John Travassaros and his uncle, Bill Summers, in the 1950s.

Mr Calokerinos’ Canberra Cafe, which his son John now helps to run, is one of the few of its kind left in the region.

Each morning, in preparation of the day ahead, he stands and feeds potatoes into a peeler before hand-cutting his own chips.

He says there is a simple reason his cafe is still standing and preparing to celebrate the cafe’s 63rd anniversary, when many others are a thing of the past.

“It’s simple, I stayed when everyone left,” he said.

As part of the Easter long-weekend celebrations, which he says could attract up to a thousand people, Mr Calokerinos has been collecting a number of items from long-gone traditional cafes around the region to use in his renovations.

“Leadlights and old wooden wall framing,” he said.

Celebrations will include a tribute to the man who established the cafe, prior to it being bought out by Mr Calokerinos and his family, Yannis “Jack Smiles” Kalokerinos.