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SANTA PAWS IS COMING TO TOWN

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BOWLED OVER DISCOVER AUSTRALIA'S BEST BOWLS CLUB

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Pictured: Charlie Davis with Luna the dog | Photo by: Shona Bryan

Riverside gem crowned Australia's best bowls club

By Ellen-Maree Elliot

Merthyr Bowls Club has been crowned the best in the country by a national travel brand as the club goes from strength to strength to attract new members and a major competition.

Wotif gave the riverside club at 60 Oxlade Drive, New Farm, the gong based on customer reviews.

Volunteer guest experience manager Al Hunt asked Wotif for the comments and his analysis revealed the most used words were “friends”, “affordable”, and “experience”.

“There are 1900 bowls clubs that were in contention for this award, what’s magical to me is they’ve voted us the best in Australia – think what that had to have meant,” Mr Hunt said.

“They might have gone once and they were so impressed by this historic, iconic, tiny club with only one green.

“Then when you read the comments they made, they all say the service was impeccable, and the

quality of food was on the money.

“For years, the club’s only been known by locals. Wotif put us on the map – well, it didn’t just put us on the map, it put us at the top of all the other clubs.”

The publicity helped the club score preliminary matches for the Bowls Premier League (BPL), the sport’s made-for-television, showpiece event, described by the sport as the “20/20 of bowls”.

“What’s cool about the BPL is any club can put a team together, it’s like a rags to riches Cinderella story if you win,” Mr Hunt said.

Mr Hunt said the bowls community had struggled for new members.

“The myth is that bowls clubs are all grey-haired seniors who are looking for something to do – for some clubs that’s true – but the success of the industry is in rebranding as a game that’s for all ages,” he said.

“Of all the people who play at Merthyr, 85 to 90 per cent are under 50 years old.”

He said that was down to the club’s strategy to attract and keep new



Merthyr Bowls Club wants the community to know that lawn bowls offers something for all ages. *Picture by Shona Bryan*

members – and the driving force behind that strategy was simple.

“The future of bowls clubs is barefoot bowling,” he said.

He said the club was one of the largest barefoot bowling venues in Australia – and was already booked out for corporate and family events until January.

“If you think of the club like a stool, the experience is the top – the seat – then you’ve got the bar, the restaurant and bowls holding it up as the legs,” he said.

“If you removed one of the legs,

it doesn’t work. It falls down.”

He’s also insistent on the need for pathways for people to become more involved in the club to encourage them to sign up for a membership, from identifying social players who may benefit from more training, running school holiday programs to offering dining memberships and, of course, competitive sporting opportunities.

“Clubs, through better branding and targeting, can attract the newer memberships they want, it’s going to take different thinking,” he said.



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