



annual report

2023

west vic business
linking business across regions



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01/ introduction

At West Vic Business we are a chamber of commerce that has recognised the need to move beyond the delivery of networking, programs and workshops to safeguard the future of our region's businesses

Being a driver of change is what we're about. Active in the facilitation and coordination of key stakeholders, our shift in focus in 2019 has played out in various ways. Exciting ways. Big change takes time, but as an organisation, we have been determined to help shift the direction and speed in which our cities and towns build precincts. Placemaking processes, strategic alliances and strategic leasing all key to their success long term

Successful social and recreational precincts that create tourism pull points, often rely on water. Water is a strong driver of economies and helps to generate much needed foot traffic. Precincts such as this also encourage the retention of youth and young families. From this, increased business activity creates more jobs. Additional jobs attract more people, more people and you begin to reverse aging demographics. And so begins the evolution to a thriving and growing region. This is where West Vic Business and its members play an essential role moving forward

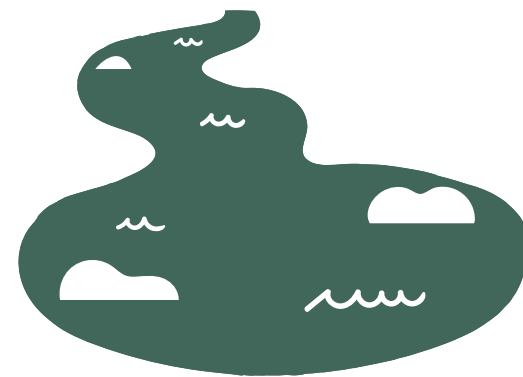
wimmera mallee

Doing business in regional Victoria is a bold and exciting proposition. Strong sectors such as agriculture, industry/manufacturing and health, bolster the position of the Wimmera Mallee as a vibrant and attractive tree change for those seeking an alternative

The vast and natural beauty of the skies and landscape, coupled with a cluster of the State's most treasured natural attractions, including The Grampians and the Little & Big Deserts, north west Victoria sits primed for growth through increased livability schemes, an equitable approach to accessibility via rail and air transportation, and an augmented revenue injection of long term major infrastructure projects and mining boom



our goal



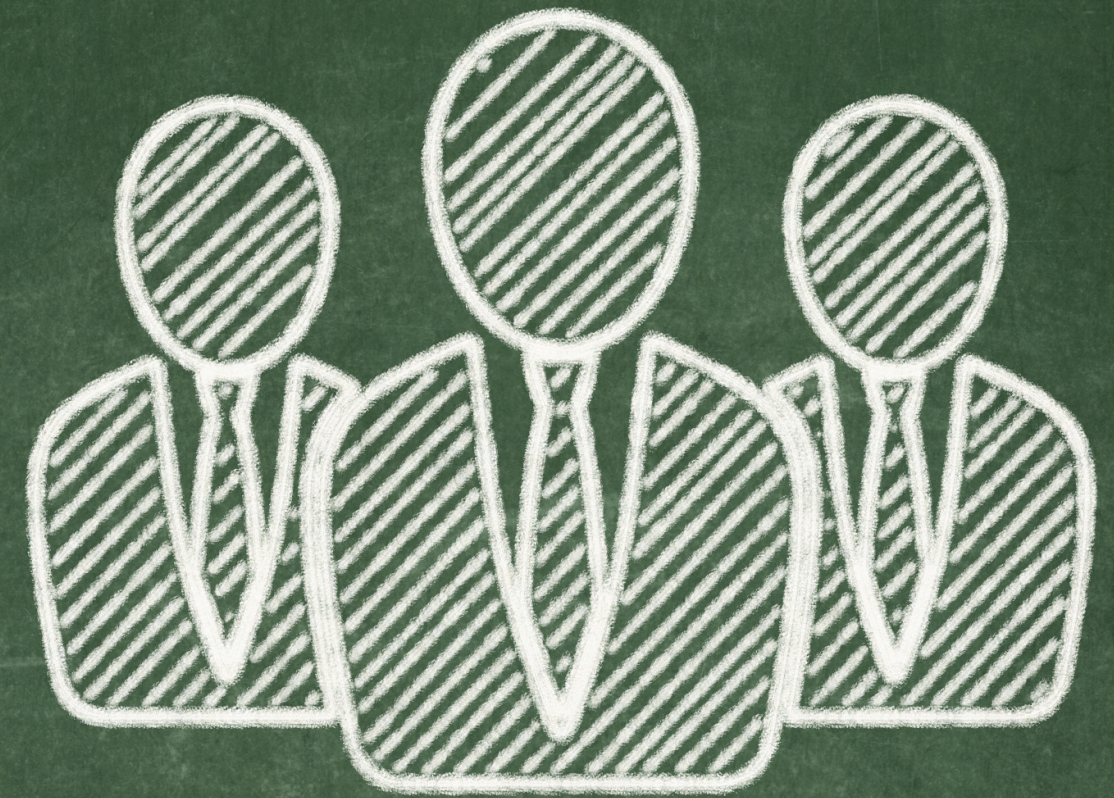
to increase existing business prosperity and new opportunities through an advocated and supported approach to specific precinct development

2023 overview

Our ambassador is a voice for local business throughout the region. Bringing light upon, and a bigger picture focus to topics of concern, representing at local, state and federal levels of government

Creating informative and captivating documents that present and support future funding opportunities with delivery to long established contacts across government, private and corporate bodies

Linking in with and bringing together key stakeholders to help build foundations for precinct development, and igniting passion and excitement with community groups, to work with a progressive and proactive purpose for growth and opportunity



Advocacy

MIND YOUR
BUSINESS

JUNE 2023

5
steps to
safeguarding
your interests

**PROTECT
THE FAMILY
BUSINESS**

*Jon
Fitzgerald*

A
Local Guide

TO BUSINESS IN
NORTH WEST
VICTORIA

Cash Sales
A thing of the past?

**HOPE
FOR
HOSPITALITY**

WEST VIC BUSINESS INC.

READY

FOR GROWTH



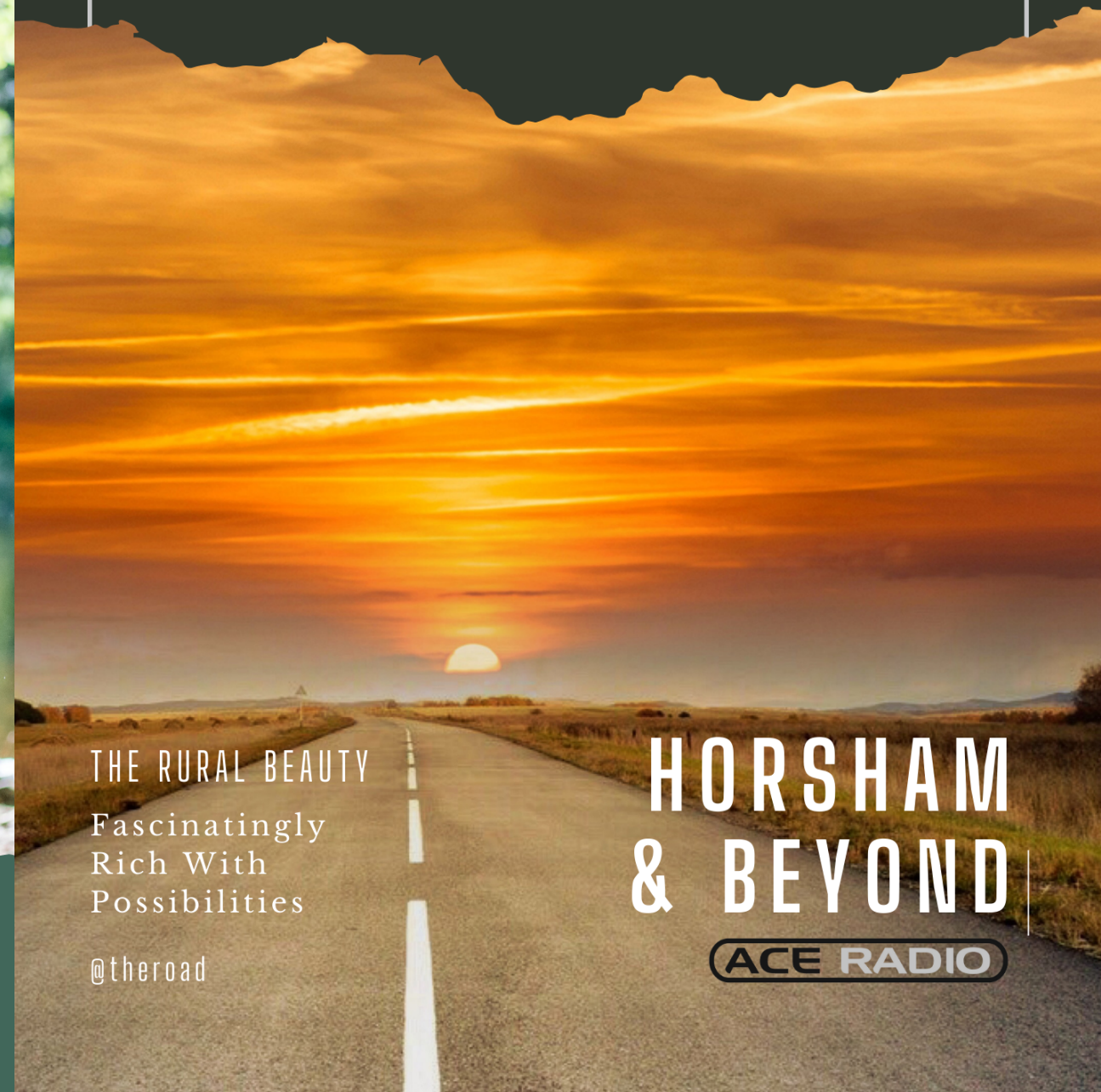
wimmera mallee, what dreams are made of

 www.westvicbusiness.com.au

THE ROAD

TO OPPORTUNITY

BUSINESS GAPS THROUGHOUT THE WIMMERA



THE RURAL BEAUTY
Fascinatingly
Rich With
Possibilities

@theroad

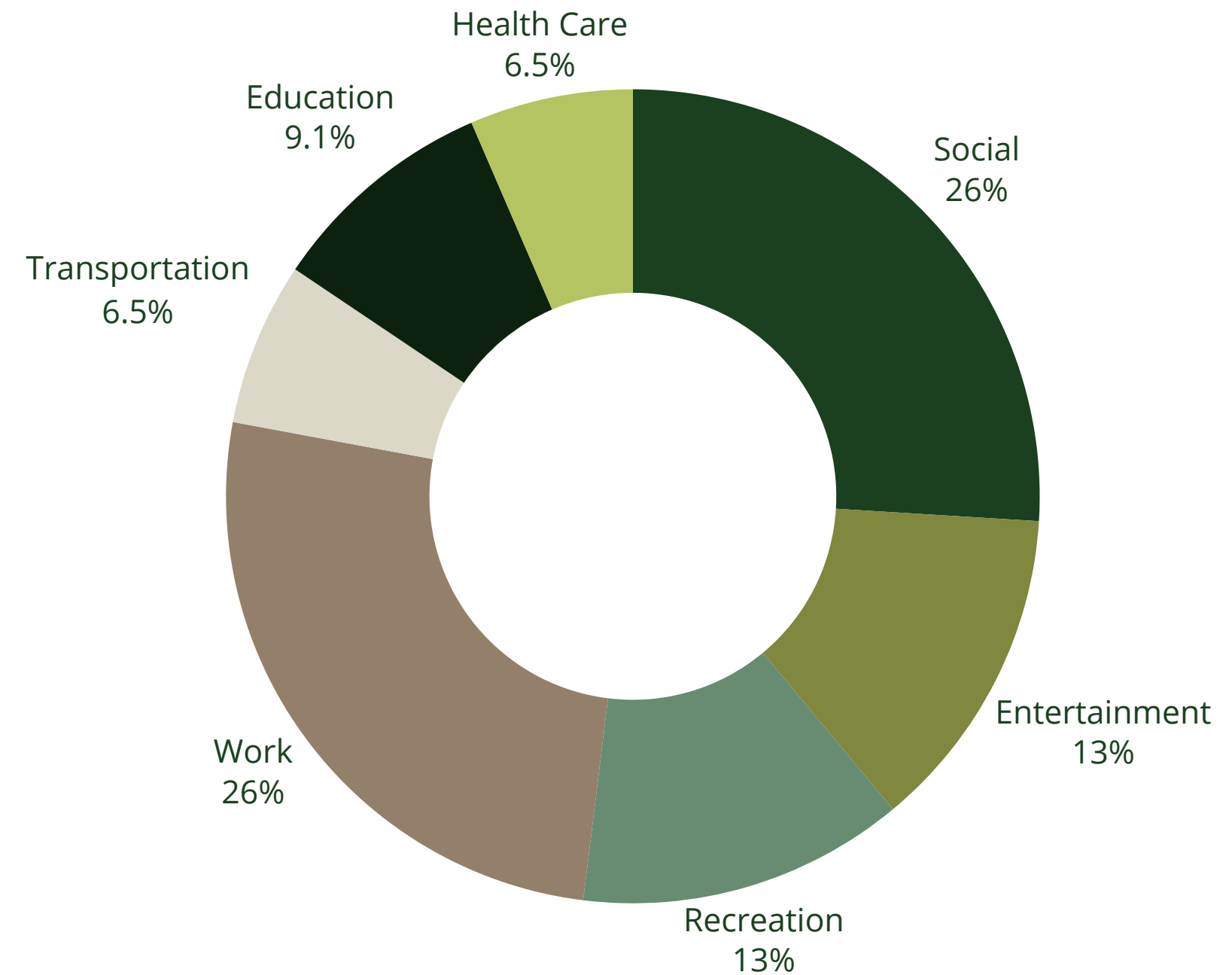
**HORSHAM
& BEYOND**

ACE RADIO

01 promotional publications
developed to reach funding,
government & business bodies

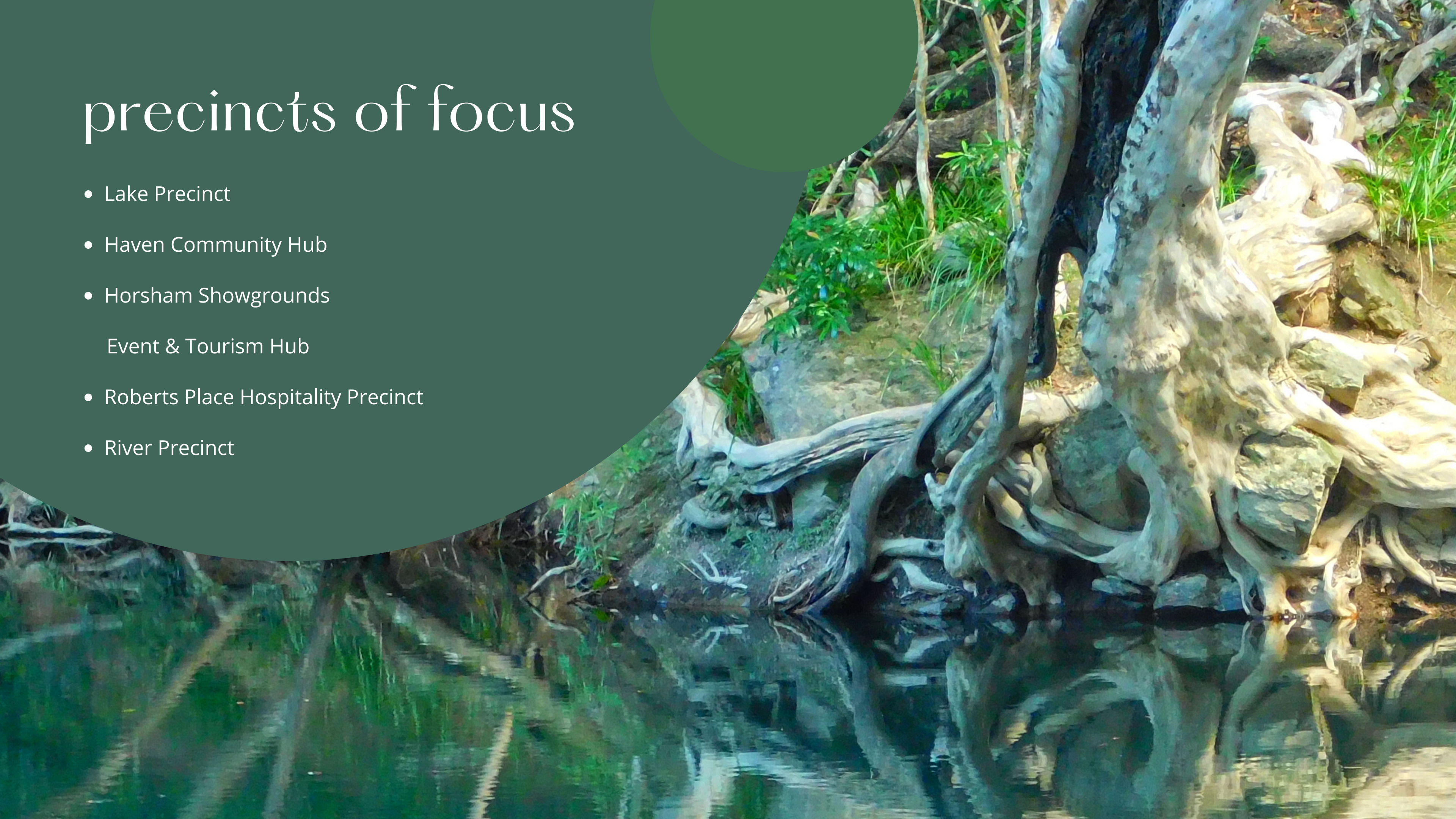
02/ be sustainable

The message is clear, and it is one that West Vic Business has carried forward since the pandemic. Regional areas need to improve livability through social and recreational development to increase revenue across sectors, and ensure sustainability long term. Be it private or government based investments, precinct development focusing on these two elements is crucial to the long term sustainability of our cities and towns throughout the Wimmera Mallee. In the chart opposite, figures represent the importance of impacting factors for young singles and couples. As age increases and family dynamics shift, so do the percentile focus. On what end of the circumference a town or city invests in its developments, will contribute significantly to population trends and declining or increasing spending habits



precincts of focus

- Lake Precinct
- Haven Community Hub
- Horsham Showgrounds
Event & Tourism Hub
- Roberts Place Hospitality Precinct
- River Precinct



haven community hub

As most are aware, vacancies exist across industry sectors that at present, are difficult to near impossible to fill. After contact by multiple employers attempting to attract candidates from outside of the region, who reported encountering congested and in many instances near or exceeding capacity at schools across the city of Horsham, West Vic Business, working alongside member Haven Community Inc., identified Haven Community Hub & Reserve as the most logical and easily expandable education, sporting, social and potential retail precinct for the increasingly popular area

The only community hub in Horsham South, a considered and forward-thinking planning process is being encouraged at a local government level, with advocacy and future planning meetings occurring across the last half of 2023 with the Chief of Staff of the Minister for Education, Regional Directors of the Department of Education, and the local leadership team at Horsham West & Haven Primary School, Haven Campus. Potential to expand positions and attract additional students at the Haven Campus and community hub through the develop of a bush school and kinder program, is being suggested as an opportunity to ease pressure across the city, and create an incredible marketing opportunity for our city and region





roberts place

The development of a member based hospitality industry sector network has commenced, with a focus on a pre-emptive and anticipatory approach to encouraging strategic leasing, and building of a hospitality and dining precinct in Roberts Place, Horsham

Identifying vacancies, garnering input from existing businesses and future movements and/or willingness to relocate and reimagine, this project is key to reinvigorating the cities social scene, and providing a drawcard for existing and new residents alike

Meetings with business owners, potential new business owners and local government, all work to ensure that a precinct that has longevity and sustainability is established. If successful, Roberts Place will provide a platform for thriving hospitality and complimentary boutique style businesses, encompassing a communal outdoor dining strip that increases revenue across the precinct, helping to reinvigorate the central activity district, and become a major drawcard for the city

river precinct

Rezoning and planning along the Wimmera River to enable the development of waterfront business opportunities in the social, recreational and hospitality sectors, is being pursued with various departments of local government

Activating points of interest along the full stretch, and both sides of the Wimmera River will be key in avoiding congestion, moving foot traffic, increasing use of gathering spaces and outdoor activities, and building another incredible tourism precinct that helps drive our local economy

Concepts presented to date include the development of a family precinct that encompasses Adventure Island, a cafe and water sports hire business adjacent and upon the marina bay area, fountain spouts centrally located in the bay for daytime watersports and night time visual interest through lighting and projected water surface images of native fish, yabby and local platypus climbing out of water onto riverbanks





showgrounds

Reimagining the presentation and support of the local agriculture and food sector, Horsham Agricultural Society, are set to build upon their ever expanding and successful event trade, with the future development of under utilised and unused spaces. With the potential to create a new and exciting precinct along the Wimmera River, the buidings of the Maydale Reserve and it's surrounding land provide a unique opportunity to play on the history of the area, and create a tourism destination that can be seen and accessed upon entry to the city

West Vic Business continue to work alongside its member, Horsham Agricultural Society, in engaging local government, key stakeholders and potential new businesses in what is sure to be one of the region's shining future attractions

lake precinct

Gathering and contemplation spaces, exercise paths, surrounding accommodation, hospitality, events, tourism and sporting developments all move beyond the traditional view point and cautious approach to investing in the development of a revenue treasure, such as Green Lake and the surrounding lake precinct

The ability to attract and halt substantial passing traffic to become a destination, rather than a break in between journey's end, is key in building our city and region moving forward. Learning from the incredible success and transformation of other cities and towns through the redevelopment of water ways, Horsham is sitting adjacent to a precinct which could effectively alter the direction of our city, capturing and redirecting impressive foot traffic and driving it into our city and businesses, helping to attract and retain youth and young families

Key stakeholder meetings and presentations to local government, water and catchment boards has continued throughout 2023, with an effort to ensure that West Vic Business's conceptual plan for the development of The Yacht Club at Green Lake and the surrounding lake area, becomes a priority for council and future funding opportunities ***#lake life means new life for business***



03/ member support

We all have rainy days, and it affects everything in life, from our business through to our families and friends

With the cost of living affecting us all, businesses have been hard hit, with some sectors bearing the brunt of the financial downturn more than others. Running a business can be hard at the best of times, but given these circumstances, along with many other factors changing the way we live and operate, the stress of it all, and navigating which way to go, can sometimes be a difficult path

Our ambassador has provided one on one support to member and non-member business owners and staff alike, throughout 2023. The request for support has increased significantly during the last half of the year, and this component of the membership service is one which we consider crucial

Our staff have undergone mental health and support training, have business management qualifications and small business advisory support, guidance, development and business management teaching experience. All at hand to help you when you need it most



member business health checks

It's not just us who needs a check up every now and then, and at West Vic Business we provide members with the opportunity to invite us in the doors, for an independent and unbiased look at their business

This year, we have seen a change over of management and ownership in a number of member businesses, and requests for our input and involvement in brainstorming and planning sessions has increased

Maybe its store layout and stock, maybe it's a new perspective that you may not have thought of. Our team, can provide guidance and support to help you identify problems, seek out solutions, and build new and exciting directions



projects

West Vic Business have been successful in submitting a grant application for the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal's Drought Preparedness Program, that has delivered near \$50,000 to create and deliver a town strategy program

The year long program will bring together representatives from shire councils, action groups, progress associations, community groups and business groups from across north west Victoria, helping to develop strategic plans for their towns and cities

The program encourages participants to look at their town as a business in its own right and strategise accordingly. Teaming again with Spark Strategy to facilitate and lead the program, West Vic Business will commence marketing and registrations for the program in the coming month





shop your town gift card program

The Shop Your Town gift card program continues to be a driver of revenue to member businesses across sectors, with recent funding from Business Victoria's Flood Recovery Grant injecting a further \$20,000 into the program

Partnering with Horsham Rural City Council and Centre for Participation, West Vic Business will combine to deliver much needed support to member businesses as part of the Horsham Christmas Extravaganza



04/ business partnerships

Throughout 2023, West Vic Business has developed a sound partnership with Telstra Business Hub (Horsham) and their regional and statewide management team

This partnership, having now been formalised, will see the ongoing support of the chamber and its member businesses, along with project specific advocacy in the future of regional connectivity

With Telstra executives keen to evaluate the success of this local partnership program, it is being touted as a potential new pilot and platform to be adopted and rolled out across the nation

part of something bigger

A unified voice for regional business, the Victorian Regional Chamber Alliance, brings together business groups and chambers of commerce from across the state

Discussing regional issues and advocating for country business communities, the VRCA meet with industry leaders, state government representatives and ministers to seek solutions and funding options for regional projects and programs

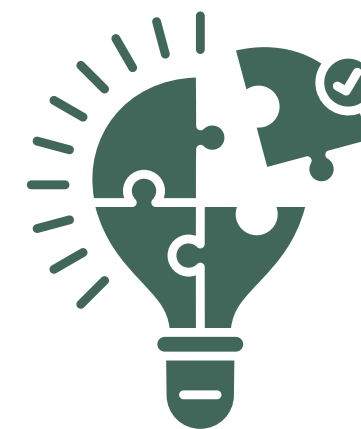
West Vic Business is proud to be an integral member of the VRCA representing north west Victoria



collaboration

Collaboration with place making and precinct development organisations such as Mainstreet Australia, is essential to continuing to build networks across the state, nation and beyond. Increasing our knowledge and understanding of how effective precincts are planned and developed, remains an internal and external growth strategy for our organisation

Mainstreet Australia continue to be a big support of West Vic Business, providing guest speakers and ongoing information and connections within their network, with additional plans underway to possibly undertake a joint precinct and placemaking event in Horsham in 2024



chapter development

The Yarriambiack Shire Council memorandum of understanding to establish a shire representative chamber of commerce is well underway, with West Vic Business and the Yarriambiack Advisory Committee working throughout 2023 to establish requirements of the new chamber

West Vic Business Yarriambiack is set to launch at the inaugural business expo in February, 2024



executive messages



Mark Clyne, Chair



Another whirlwind year within regional business. Facilitating, hosting and representing at meetings with stakeholders to help drive the Wimmera Mallee forward, and advocating on major issues affecting our region, has continued to be our core role. With so much achieved, we can still work towards more in 2024 to make the region a better place to live, work and do business. The business community are looking forward to the opportunities that will arise from the expanding agribusiness sector, and numerous proposed mineral sands projects, along with many other infrastructure projects. This is set to change the footprint of our city and region significantly, and for the better, opening opportunities for business and developments across sectors. As Chair, I thank the West Vic Business team of staff and Executive who give their time graciously to inject their industry experience and personal ideas into projects to make the region they love, a better place to live, work and do business



Chan Uoy, Vic Chair



We all crave new experiences and connections that have meaning in our lives. These elements are what make a place liveable and desirable. The Wimmera has opportunities to create unique experiences by reimagining the spaces and its underused heritage assets. One only needs an open mind and a bold vision, and the world of possibility is before you. There were those in Dimboola that said the town would never turn around. Still, they were glad they were wrong when they experienced the outdoor Wimmera Steampunk Festival. New and quirky shops have transformed heritage buildings into a destination experience, with the town now attracting a diverse range of people who want to visit and live here. This transformation is possible for other towns in the Wimmera if they embrace the imagination. Collectively, the Wimmera can reimagine and rebuild a future of new experiences



Stacey Taig, Ambassador



Representing and supporting our region's business community has been an honor and an incredibly rewarding experience. I am continually amazed at the ingenuity and resilience demonstrated by so many across all sectors, and it is their strength and determination that drive me and the wider team at West Vic Business, to give our all. Place making processes and precinct development have been a focus of the organisation since its establishment 16 years ago. With this being key in safeguarding our regional business communities moving forward, we are proud to now be at the forefront of this movement, and becoming the essential link between key stakeholders and the business community. West Vic Business is a truly altruistic organisation, and that is what makes the work with this incredible group of professionals, all that more enjoyable. I look forward to serving you all in 2024



Catherine Shirrefs, Treasurer



Project funding from the state government and organisations such as FRRR have continued to bolster West Vic Business financials and enabled the development and implementation of projects that have incredible rolling impacts across our region as a whole. We thank the teams and individuals within these departments and organisations, that have provided support and guidance throughout 2023. Continuing to work alongside these funding bodies and building a strong and trusted working relationship, has and will be a focus from our administrative team and staff.

Seeking alternative sources to create new and innovative programs and projects that will change the direction of our city centre, and the region, will be where we place our focus in 2024. We are excited to see where our funding relationships take us, and more importantly, where it takes the Wimmera Mallee

treasurer's report

A seemingly perfect storm of financial impacting factors is having a profound effect on regional businesses, with increasing energy and utility costs, difficulties in securing stock and products via normal supply chains, the cost of services, materials and freight, all compounded by relentless inflation and rising interest rates

Add to this, the need and push from employees, seeking higher wages to combat similar personal financial crisis through cost of living increases, and you have pressure building from both sides. Sectors that have been particularly hard hit are hospitality, retail, service and manufacturing. With an almost blanket issue of attracting and retaining staff across industry sectors, this too is placing undue stress and financial burdens on many SME's across our region

With many considering either selling or closing the doors, or alternatively, seeking any means possible to cut costs, what is the impact on small business advisory and support services such as business groups and chambers of commerce? There has been a definite loss of membership across the state and country. The need to seek financial support for these crucial services, and what is undeniably the most trusted and accessible conduit between business and government, is a must in 2024. And as we leave 2023 behind us, West Vic Business remains strong, financially impacted but secure, and this in itself is a true success *(financial report available upon request)*

Catherine Shirrefs

time to build beyond statistics

Approximately 180,000 regional Australians aged between 20 and 35 years moved to capital cities between 2011 and 2016, according to census data. Of those, just one-third eventually returned to a regional area. Their decision to either move away or stay in the country had more to do with emotions and identity than money, education or job opportunities.

ABC News



2024 the year of action

- Identify gaps, build opportunities for young entrepreneurs and new business owners
- Creating social and recreational business opportunities to offset downturn in declining sectors and cater to younger target audiences
- Reimagine targeted boutique shopping experiences
- Create visual representation of possibilities to enable vision and action where required, to develop and stimulate cohesive and sustainable precincts
- Be a conduit between private and government sectors to assist growth and development
- Build industry specific networks



key stakeholders

- Centre for Participation
- Federation University Australia
- WSW Rural Finance Counselling Service
- WSM Development
- Horsham Rural City Council
- Hindmarsh Shire Council
- West Wimmera Shire Council
- Yarriambiack Shire Council
- Northern Grampians Shire Council
- Ararat Rural City Council
- Wimmera Catchment Management Authority
- GWM Water
- Department of Education
- Department of Jobs Precincts & Regions
- Business Victoria
- FRRR
- Telstra
- nbn Co.

together we can do
much more



