

Trucking families honour their

LOST MATES

THE White Hill Truck Drivers Memorial in Murray Bridge honours truckies and transport industry stalwarts who have passed away, and was opened with a memorial service and family fun weekend in late November.

JACINTA ROSE catches up with the man who made the memorial possible.

TRUCK driving can be a lonely and potentially dangerous job, with truckies often leaving home for days at a time with no guarantee of returning.

When a truckie fails to make it home, their loss is felt strongly throughout the transport community and leaves a gaping hole for their family.

Truckies and their families now have a special spot to gather and remember lost mates and loved ones: the Murray Bridge memorial. It is the brainchild of Tailem Bend driver Keith Wood, who worked tirelessly lobbying the council, designing, fundraising and eventually building the first stage of the structure.

"Keith has done everything from the ground up, starting with the excavations and then the actual stonework," his wife Cathie said. "He even designed it himself."

The journey from idea to completion has been a long one, with a loyal group of volunteers helping to make the memorial a reality.

"I first spoke to (local state MP) Adrian Pederick three years ago and it's been about 12 months since we started on the design," Keith said.

After the original plan to build a memorial at the White Hill truck stop on the South Eastern Freeway was rejected by road

safety organisations, the new location on Adelaide Road at

Murray Bridge was selected for its history as a transport corridor, scenic setting and B-double access.

The memorial was opened with a moving memorial service at the site, followed by a family fun weekend at the Murray Bridge racecourse on November 23-24.

Convoys of trucks made the journey to Murray Bridge from Keith and Wingfield, many of the 32 rigs carrying tribute banners to their former mates.

The service included a stirring performance of *A truckie's last letter*, a song written by Golden Guitar award winner Graham Rogers and singer Dale Duncan, with all sale proceeds going to drivers' health organisation – Trans-Help Foundation.

"It was a very moving service, there were plenty of tears," Cathie said.

After the service, the mood was lightened as visitors flocked to the family event at the racecourse.

"We wanted to make sure the weekend had a real family focus, so we had three-legged and sack races for the kids, vintage cars and trucks, steam engines and face painting," Keith said.

"We also held a ute muster on the Saturday and got about 65

utes involved."

Keith has been in the transport industry for 25 years, and has lost mates along the way.

"The transport industry is like one great big family – when you lose someone everyone feels it," he said.

"I've got about eight mates who are listed on the Tarcutta,

NSW, truck drivers' memorial, but that's about 1000 kilometres away. I thought we needed somewhere closer where we can remember the local guys who are no longer around."

Other memorials have been built at Tamworth in NSW and Gatton, Qld.

The White Hill memorial consists of two stone walls – the first for truckies killed on the road and the other for industry stalwarts who pass away from natural causes.

"Everything here is donated – from the pavers to the metal signage," Keith said. "The support from the industry and local businesses has been fantastic."

The second stage of the project will involve extensive landscaping, laying bitumen around a nearby rose garden, and installing a signpost pointing to other truckie memorials across Australia.

Next year's memorial service and fun day will be held on November 29.

“Over the next couple of years as more people hear about it and want to attend, we’re hoping to have 6000 to 8000 people coming to the racecourse and memorial service,” Keith said.

He is also passionate about keeping truckies on the road and off the memorial list, coordinating the SA branch of Trans-Help. The foundation was set up interstate in 2006 by Keith’s sister Dianne Carrol after the death of her truckie husband, and offers free health checks to drivers and transport company staff.

“We go from the WA border to the Nhill, Vic, changeover and everywhere in between with our van offering health checks,” Keith said.

He has seen families struggle to cope with the loss of a loved one on the road first-hand, and said it was important to offer support to those left behind.

“We’ve had wives left behind who have lost their houses as a result of getting bad advice after their husband’s death,” Keith said.

“We don’t just offer medical help for truckies – we also have counselling and legal support like solicitors for affected families.”



REMEMBERING MATES: The memorial has 27 plaques honouring fallen truck drivers and industry icons.



EXCELLENT EFFORTS: The team at the SA branch of the Trans-Help Foundation – treasurer Natasha Smith, coordinator Keith Wood, and secretary Cathie Wood – have been instrumental in the development of the White Hill Truck Drivers Memorial. **INSET:** The White Hill memorial consists of two stone walls – the first for truckies killed on the road and the other for industry stalwarts who pass away from natural causes.

