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DALE HUNT

Mounties Group Chief Executive Officer

The natural evolution of retirement living

A natural evolution

With over 200,000 members and growing, Sydney-based club Mounties Group is looking to tap into the ageing journey with an expansion of its retirement living, home care and healthcare services.

BY LAUREN BROOMHAM

After its successful entry into retirement living with the launch of its intergenerational Harbord Diggers development in 2018, the Group is now rapidly expanding its home care business – and moving into general practices – to cater to its ageing members.

The 60-year-old Not For Profit was established as the Mt Pritchard & District Community Club at Mount Pritchard, 34km southwest of the Sydney CBD.



The Harbord Diggers Club at Freshwater

Today, the Group has expanded to four sites in Western Sydney, two on Sydney's Northern Beaches and three on the NSW Central Coast – and the demographics of its almost 210,000 members have shifted significantly.

Group CEO Dale Hunt points out that when the organisation was founded, the average age of its members was 21.

“Today, the average age is now 57. So as our members have aged, and their healthcare needs grow, it was an actual extension for us to meet our purpose by meeting those needs.”

Watermark Freshwater penthouses now over \$5 million

In line with this mission, the Group [launched its first 96-apartment retirement village Watermark Freshwater](#) – managed by the Watermark group, led by partners Enzo Marchione, Tony Olding and Chris Wall – at its Harbord Diggers site in 2018.

Constructed as part of a \$160 million redevelopment of the Club, the village is part of an intergenerational precinct featuring childcare, allied health, gym and aquatics centre, family entertainment plus club facilities which had already made a \$4 million profit before it opened its doors.

The village itself then commanded premium prices of between \$1.5 million and \$3.8 million.

Today, ground-floor apartments are re-selling for \$1.6 million to \$1.7 million with the 11 three-bedroom penthouses priced at over \$5 million.

The village also has a long waiting list with the majority of those in line friends of existing residents.



“We don’t market our village. Our residents talk about our village, and how it has improved our lives and that is where our enquiries come from.”

Intergenerational model key to community’s success

A key factor in the village’s success is its sense of community, said Dale.

“The connectivity in the community is just phenomenal. Everyone has access to the fitness centre and social activities where they gather together as a community and then they are also part of the Club itself,” he said.

“We have now had to install bocce courts and more amenities because of the demand from residents. So, it has certainly given us the drive to do more.”

The intergenerational nature of the site has also proved to be a pull factor.

“People were hesitant when they first heard of it,” acknowledged Dale.

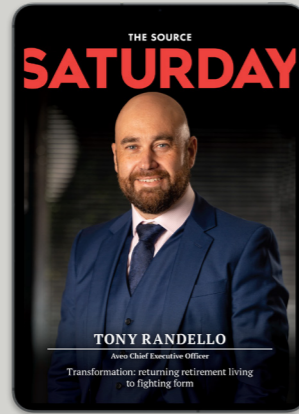
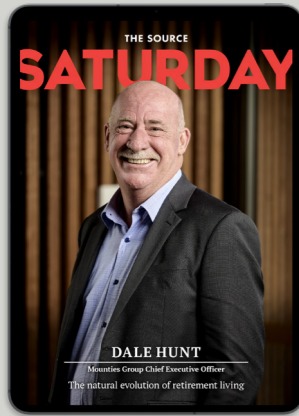
“But once it came into play, our residents at Watermark Freshwater now likely receive more visits from their grandchildren than almost any other retirement village around. The play centre, the swimming lessons, the children coming to the Club for dinner or a coffee – it’s a model everyone should look at.

“The most important lesson that I have taken away is that you build the community before you build the group, and that is what sets our retirement village apart.”

Home care important piece of the “jigsaw puzzle”

Mounties also made an entry into home care in late 2020 with the launch of its Mounties Care brand. The service – available to all members including village residents – provides a suite of integrated





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clinical and home care services including home care, respite care, Hospital in the Home & Chemo in the Home, allied health and welfare calls.

The service [won the Health & Wellbeing category](#) at the NSW Clubs & Community Awards in 2021 – and Dale – who trained as a Registered Nurse – says it forms a critical piece of the “jigsaw puzzle” to help people living independently at home for longer.

He points to his family’s own experience of the acute care system when his wife was diagnosed with terminal cancer 13 years ago.

“She went through six specialists, and they all said, ‘No, you’ve got between three and six months to live’, but she finally found one who was amazing – and she survived. But when we were going for treatment at the hospital, she would sit in this horrible ward with other people around her and the

next week, one of those people wouldn’t be there,” he stated.

“I don’t understand why we can’t look after people in their own home while they are sitting in the comfort of their own lounge.”

“We should be taking healthcare to a level where it is about improving lives, and not just treating people.”

Free Care Concierge is most-used service

One of its most successful services under the Mounties Care brand is its free Care Concierge – manned by Registered Nurses with a minimum of 15 years’ experience and available 9am-5pm, Monday to Friday – which provides information on its services to members, performs welfare checks on older members and offers assistance to navigate the aged care system.

While the number of welfare calls coming in has fallen post-COVID-19 restrictions, Dale says they are now receiving more requests for aged care help.

“The Care Concierge is now very much about helping people understand the aged care system, and how to apply for assistance.”

5,000 home care clients

The Group further extended its push into the home care space earlier this year with the [acquisition of the NSW-based Carers & Companions](#), which provides a range of home care support options and took its number of home care clients to 5,000.

“The business was on the market,” said Dale. “We liked its approach, ethics, and the way it looked after its customers, and we could see the value that would bring into the lives of our members.”

“The acquisition was simply an opportunity to expand the services that we always planned to do, and reach more people, but it all works together as part of that jigsaw puzzle. Overall, what you are simply saying is, ‘We can help someone’s life, but what are the pieces that will make the biggest difference in their life in a positive way?’”

Providing GP services is “natural evolution”

Now the Group has put another feather in its cap, with an expansion into general practice.

After acquiring two GP practices, Mounties is building another medical centre with two more expected to be built in the next six months.

Each practice will offer an integrated model of healthcare with general practitioners,

nutritionists, physiotherapists and exercise physiologists all on site.

“The idea is to take a more holistic approach to general medicine,” explained Dale.

“Instead of the normal seven-minute cycle, our doctors spend between 12 and 15 minutes with each patient, and we try to take a whole-of-life preventative approach, as well as provide the immediate treatment.”

“It’s a natural evolution of our services.”

Now eyeing further developments – including affordable seniors’ housing

Mounties is now looking to further expand into home care and retirement living – with more intergenerational developments and affordable housing potentially on the cards.

“We’re in the market for acquisitions, we’re looking at amalgamations, and we’re interested in doing some developments,” said Dale.

“But what I would love to start to look at is affordable retirement housing. If you have rented your whole life, you are unlikely to be able to afford a retirement village.”

“Of course, we will do another Watermark, it has proven that it is certainly well worth it, but I also want to look at what we can do in the affordable retirement market.”

Dale in particular pinpoints southwest Sydney as an area of interest given its diverse communities.

“If you build a community, we can bring people from different backgrounds together



so why can’t we do the same with retirement? If you can break down the barriers, it makes the community a better place in which to live.”

“We will continue to grow across all our areas, because I think we are making a difference.”

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