

AROUND THE BAY

WOW makes the music go round



Way ahead: Rob Rowe reflects on the achievements of Way Out West in Williamstown. Picture: Cathy Jackson

By Lina Mesiti

BANK manager by day, music guru by night, that's Spotswood resident Rob Rowe.

Mr Rowe is the mastermind behind Way Out West [WOW], a roots music event organiser that was set up in Williamstown in December, 2001.

From its humble beginnings, WOW has become one of the most popular music event agents in the industry.

"My love of music started when I was a little kid," says the manager of Bendigo Bank, Williamstown. "I always had a passion for it and lived for it. It was a way I could escape into my own little world."

"We started WOW about nine years ago because any time we wanted to go and see a band, we'd have to travel [to] Brunswick, Richmond or Collingwood and we thought, why can't we do something here [and organise music events in Williamstown]?"

A few friends got together and decided to form a club to do so. They thought the RSL would be the perfect venue for performances.

"We knew the RSL would support us, but we didn't want to impose on their Saturday night music," Mr Rowe said. "I got 10 mates to put in \$50 each as a

stake and approached management with the idea of putting on a band on a Sunday afternoon. We had no idea how it would go, but we went ahead with it."

About 40 locals turned up to the first WOW gig and, given that there was no advertising, it was a pleasing result.

"We had no idea about advertising and basically took a punt and tried to make something happen."

The rest is 'history'. The club's long association with the Williamstown RSL, has proved a hit, the two combining to provide family-friendly, class acts for music lovers.

"It's been a terrific partnership, but we've never lost sight of what we set out to do: to bring music to the west," Mr Rowe says.

"The important thing to us is to treat the musicians with respect, unlike some other venues. I think that's something we've become known for."

It took only about four months for the word about WOW to spread.

"After a few months, it wasn't me ringing a band saying, 'You don't know who I am... I'd say, 'We're from WOW', and the band members would say, 'Yes, we've heard about you'," Mr Rowe said.

"The response was over-

whelming, it just blew us away to realise how far we'd come in such a short time."

"What we have at the RSL is a listening environment and when we put on some of the older bands, parents want to bring their kids along to hear the music they grew up listening to. It's a family-friendly venue, it's affordable and the musicians appreciate that."

WOW has a strong support base, which includes a committee and sound engineers. It has 140 members.

The group has attracted well-known performers and bands, including Renee Geyer, the Brewster Brothers, Joe Camilleri, Ross Hannaford, Mental as Anything and international stars Eugene 'Hideway' Bridges and Lulo Reinhardt.

WOW is sure to be around for many years to come.

"It's been a great ride so far and we'll be doing our best to make sure we're around for a long time," Mr Rowe said.

The next act lured by the group is The Dingoes, who will perform at the RSL on Sunday, August 8.

Details: www.wowrnc.org.au
■ If you have any tips about groups or individuals making a difference in Hobsons Bay, contact lina.mesiti@fairfaxmedia.com.au