

Thirty years of helping students

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Page 21 | Section: General

594cm on the page



Host mum Sandra, has made a lifetime of memories and friendships by hosting university students with her husband Reg in their Lambton home. Picture by Jonathan Carroll

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AS SOON as you walk into the doors of Sandra and Reg's place in Lambton, you can't help but feel at home.

Photographs of friends and family hang on the lounge room wall, nick-nacks line the shelves of the glass cabinet collected from their travels and there's a bowl of individually wrapped sweets ready to be offered to their next guest.

It's no surprise that when they have students who are studying at the University of Newcastle stay with them - they feel right at home.

"They walk in the door and they say 'hello mum and dad'," Sandra said.

For three decades 66-year-old Sandra and 72-year-old

Reg have hosted international students and it all started from an ad in the *Newcastle Herald* in 1990.

"There was an ad about the Lions Club sponsoring overseas students to attend year 12 high school for one year," Sandra said.

"And I thought let's just do it, it was more of a why not?"

Their first guest was Camilla, a Norwegian girl who stayed with them and for the last 35 years, they've hosted students from South Korea, Japan, China, Thailand and a Colombian student who now works for NASA.

"Some would come for two weeks, six weeks or even eight months and then we'd have their siblings want to come and stay because they had such a wonderful time,"

Sandra said.

"I like to help them to give them a foot in the door and I'd hope that if my children were overseas doing the same thing, someone would help them."

Over the years Sandra and Reg formed connections and travelled overseas to attend weddings and even walked one of their "kids" down the aisle.

Currently through the Australian Homestay Network, the couple have three students staying with them who include sisters Hadiya and Fatma from Nairobi, Kenya and Nachi from Yamaguchi, Japan.

With the demand for rental accommodation high in the Hunter region, Homestay has been an ideal alternate

accommodation option for both international and regional students.

"It just gives them a chance to get settled in and learn how to stand on their feet without the extra stress," Sandra said.

A recent study by the University of Newcastle found young people in the Hunter have never experienced a healthy housing market, lead researcher and Institute for Regional Futures director and UON professor Roberta Ryan said.

"There has been a consistent undersupply of both rentals and properties to purchase. The last time that the Hunter had a healthy supply of rentals was 2013-2015," she said.

UON professor and dep-

uty Vice-Chancellor Mark Hoffman said the demand for rental accommodation was a limiting factor for many high-quality students coming to Newcastle and the Homestay program was helping to fill a gap.

"We have implemented a range of initiatives to help domestic and international students in their search for accommodation. The Homestay program can help us meet student accommodation needs, through either short or long-term stays in local homes, as well as building community connections," he said.

Also helping students settle into life in Newcastle, the university has announced an International Student Ambassador program.