



All Things Assyrian

Australia By an Assyrian

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He was born in Lebanon and is an advocate for Assyrian war veterans but there's a place Gaby Kiwarkis loves more than any other.

He calls it "real Australia" and you get there by driving out of Sydney and over the Blue Mountains.

The Assyrian Levies Association president said visiting rural areas was the only way you could really experience the sunburnt country.



"Part of my job is to show the Assyrian community the real Australia," he said.

"It's a great country, it's a blessed country.

"Unfortunately some people that live in Fairfield never go to see that."

The biggest part of "real Australia" Mr Kiwarkis has been able to share with the Assyrian community is the annual Anzac Day parade.

In 2000 he successfully lobbied Anzac House to allow Assyrian war veterans to march alongside Australian diggers at the event.

A year later he took a group from Fairfield into the city.

"It was incredible," he said.

"The old men we took in - every single one of them was complaining of aches and pains.

"But when the bagpipes started playing they started straightening up. And at the end they said 'Gaby, we feel like we are 20 again'."

This week Mr Kiwarkis hopes to again bring the two cultures together at the unveiling of the Assyrian-Anzac Memorial in Fairfield.

The plaque will honour Victorian Lieutenant General Stanley George Savige and Captain Kenneth Nicol, from New Zealand, who helped a number of Assyrian refugees flee wartorn areas during World War I.

The families of both men will be present at the unveiling of the monument in Fairfield Park at 10am on Saturday.

Also present will be Fairfield RSL president John Burgess, Assyrian Archbishop Mar Meelis Zaia, NSW Government MLC Charlie Lynn and members of the Australian Defence Force Federation Guard.

It is expected hundreds of people from Fairfield's Assyrian community, who helped lobby Fairfield Council to have the monument approved, will attend.

The group made headlines when they bombarded a council meeting in March to show their support for the memorial.

The incident was condemned by Mayor Nick Lalich but Mr Kiwarkis said all members of the council were invited to attend the unveiling of the memorial.

"It's the first time something like this has been erected outside the Assyrian church," Mr Kiwarkis said. "It is a really big deal."

Mr Kiwarkis came to Australia with his family as a ten-year-old in 1970.

He attended Fairfield West Public School and Fairfield Boys High School before joining the Australian Army aged 17.

Now the Wakeley resident spends most of his time volunteering for the two organisations he founded - the [Assyrian Levis](#) Association and Assyrian Eagle Scouts of Australia.

Mr Kiwarkis said his next challenge was to have the small area around the memorial renamed the Assyrian Memorial Park in honour of the 750,000 Assyrians who died during World War II.

He said he also hoped to have a memorial erected in Wellington, New Zealand in honour of Captain Nicol.

By Laura Trieste

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