

Secret joys of Somerset

Moreton Bay residents are being enticed to sample the Somerset region's attractions, as the *Times'* **Andre Grimaux** discovered this week.

CRAIG Lowndes this week threw his support behind a renewed push to attract more visitors to his hometown of Kilcoy.

The Australian motorsport legend was a special guest at Tuesday's first tour of the Somerset Region's "Hidden Secrets", co-ordinated by the Somerset Regional Tourism Association.

It was simply by chance the trip, for local media and business groups, fell on a rare day off for the popular V8 driver.

"For me, this place is perfect – it's within an hour of Brisbane, it has a great country feel, there are a lot of attractions like the (Somerset) dam, bike tracks and vineyards, and it's such a welcoming place," Lowndes told the *Times*.

Lowndes' appearance during lunch at Kilcoy's Chantilly Blue Cafe, a regular haunt for him and

his family, was one of many highlights on the trip.

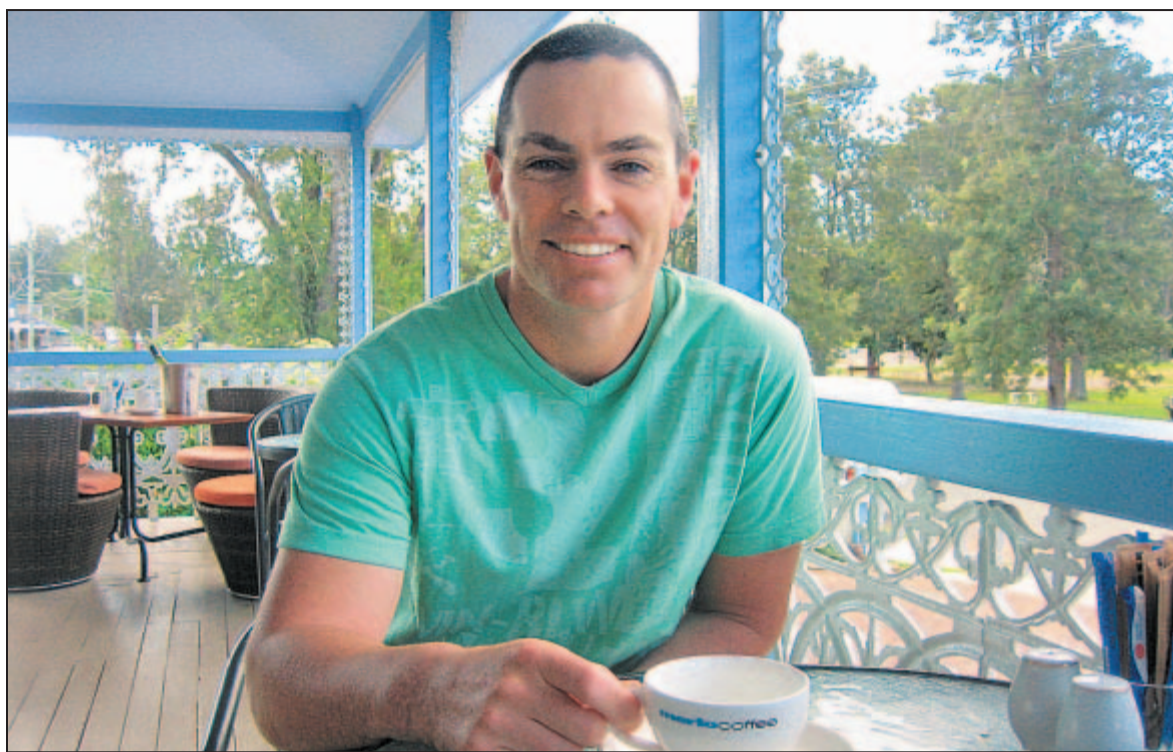
But the essence of what the region has to offer was captured by the very people looking to drive the local tourism industry.

Steve and Leonie Shirley run Kilcoy Farmstay, a 120-year-old homestead that overlooks the northern end of Lake Somerset. John Gavin operates the Neurum

Creek Bush Retreat at the base of Mt Archer, a popular camping spot that attracts on average 350 people every weekend.

One of the two wineries on the trip was the 30-year-old Woongooroo Estate at Neurum, run by former Kilcoy Shire councillor Phil Close and his wife, Gail. The cellar door cafe is a polished operation, and is home to the Woongooroo wine-infused ice-cream.

The other winery on the tour was Winya Wines, which is just



DRIVING FORCE: Craig Lowndes proudly shows off one of his favourite local haunts, Kilcoy's Chantilly Blue Cafe. (Inset) Kilcoy Farmstay owners Leonie and Steve Shirley, with dog Sheba.



off the main drag as you come into Kilcoy from Caboolture.

Vigneron Snowy Pratten has lived in Sandy Creek Rd his whole life, and with wife, Susie, sells a fine selection of red and white wine sourced from their 1.2ha of vines.

All are passionate about opening the Kilcoy region to visitors.

The tourism association plans to relaunch its website – www.somersettourism.com.au – on July 6, but more information on local attractions is available on the site now.



GRAPE EXPECTATIONS: Winya Wines features 1.2ha of vineyard.

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