

Guests get taste of new-old cafe



THREE LIKELY LADS: From left, Erik Ozols from Bingara, Chris Houston from Moree and James Aroney of Sydney. James is a grandson of Emanuel Aroney, one of the three businessmen who built the Roxy and the cafe.

THE first two milkshakes at the newly-launched Peters & Co (Roxy) Cafe in Bingara were consumed by local residents Bob and Elva Kirk when the gala launch party was held earlier this month.

The Kirks purchased the cafe, which was originally opened on March 28, 1936, in the mid-1960s. They lived with their young family in the upstairs area and operated a memorabilia shop downstairs.

In 1989 the Kirks sold it to Peter Yuen, who operated it as a Chinese restaurant for the next two decades before it was purchased by Gwydir Shire Council in 2007.

Thanks to a \$750,000 heritage grant in 2009, work began on restoring the magnificent art deco cafe to its original splendour.

Instead of the builders, Dominico Blue Builders, of Armidale, having to reproduce the original cafe, most of the original fittings and fixtures were utilised, thanks to Mr Kirk's "bowerbird" tendencies. He had kept most of the furnishings from the cafe and adjacent Roxy Theatre's in storage when he was custodian of the building, so it was only fitting that Mr and Mrs Kirk were first up at the milkshake counter at the Saturday night opening.

Creating the frothy delights for the couple and other guests were former Inverell cafe operators Con Fardouly and Peter Gianneas.

The gala ball in Bingara's Maitland St attracted 400 patrons, the majority of whom were of Greek descent.

Several of those were direct descendants of the cafe's builders: Emanuel



STARGAZING: Tamworth ladies Trudi Ambrose, left, and Tania Hooper brushed shoulders with actor John Wood, a frequent Bingara visitor and MC for the night.



FIRST TASTE: Bob and Elva Kirk enjoy the first milkshakes at the gala opening at the weekend.

Aroney, Peter Feros and George Psaltis.

A Greek band, HaVaLe, created the atmosphere, along with the performing dance troupe from the Greek Orthodox community of NSW, Lakemba, under the direction of Paroula Thurban.

Special guests at the dinner included Senator John Williams, former NSW premier Bob Carr, Gwydir Shire Council mayor John Coulton, actor John Wood, who performed MC duties for the evening, and Kytherian Association of Australia president Dr Victor Kepreotis.

Also at the weekend, the Greek museum, housed above the historic cafe and theatre, was launched.

This will become a place of national significance that traces the story of Greek immigration to Australia, and the history of Greek cafes as they spread across our nation to major cities and became ingrained in the culture of small country towns.



TO THE NINES: Carly Rose, left, and Marilyn Dixon, both Bingara ladies, were dressed to kill.



FROM THE TABLELANDS: Rosemary Torbay, left, *The Northern Daily Leader* journalist Wendy Spooner and Northern Tablelands MP Richard Torbay.



MORE CONNECTION: David and Donna Inman from Moree. Bingara-born David is an electrical contractor and was delighted to secure the contract to work on the Peters & Co Cafe restoration.



RUBBING SHOULDERS: Peter Aroney, a grandson of Emanuel Aroney, with Bingara's Nancy MacInnes, one of the driving forces behind the Roxy restoration project.



HAPPY IN THE SERVICE: From left, Lions Gary Foster, Keith Macartney, Roxy volunteer Fay Macartney and Lion Allister Lemin, all of Bingara, were some of the wait staff on the night.



CAFE SOCIETY: Judy and Peter Gianneas of Inverell are the former proprietors of Pete's Place in that town, which was originally the Black and Green Bar.