



# SUPER STUPA

**From Tibet to Bendigo, a Buddhist dream grows brighter in Myers Flat.**

P4-5



**SIZE:** The Great Stupa in Myers Flat will be 50 square metres at its base and nearly 50 metres high.  
Picture: JIM ALDERSEY



# Great task has presence

**DIANNE DEMPSEY**

YOU can feel its presence when you walk through the native gardens and bushland of the Atisha Buddhist Centre. It is there in the background waiting for you to discover it.

At first you catch a glimpse through the distant ironbarks. Metal where there should be scrub, cement where there should be sky.

The bushland here is a place of quiet meditation, the set point is silence. Only a golden Labrador is silly enough to run and bark.

There are rooms of teaching and prayer here. Statues of the Buddha. You instinctively follow a track, curious now to find the source of that glimpse of metal. Suddenly it presents itself and you try to comprehend its mammoth size.

The story behind the Great Stupa of Universal Compassion goes back to 1981 when a Buddhist monk Lama Thubten Yeshe, a refugee from Tibet, was leading a group of local people in prayer and learning.

The 120 acres of land they were on belonged to Ed Green, the father of former Bendigo advertising executive Ian Green.

When Mr Green's father donated the land to the monks, Lama Yeshe walked up to the

rise and looked about him. This was his master plan: "Over there a gompa (or meeting room) for prayer and meditation; over there accommodation for visitors and a hospice; over there a monastery for the monks; and here, on top of the rise will be the Great Stupa of Universal Compassion."

That was the vision and over the years, Ian Green along with his wife Judy and countless friends and helpers have gradually fulfilled it. The stupa is inspired by the Great Stupa of Gyantse in Tibet and is being built on the same scale.

It will eventually be 50 metres high and is now almost halfway to that height. The base is 50 metres square.

Once completed it will be the largest stupa in the Western world.

It is intended as a place of pilgrimage for Buddhists of all traditions.

The interior temple will hold 500 people and a library and on each level there will be shrines, with sacred Buddhist relics being kept on the sixth level.

Although it is being built as a great spiritual beacon, the stupa has a material and commercial aspect to it. It is being built to last 1000 years and is expected to cost \$20 million.

Ian Green is the chairman and director of the Great Stupa. And while some people spend their retirement playing bowls, Mr Green says that he feels privileged to spend his time travelling from country to country, raising money for the stupa's completion. All of the money has been donated.

For Mr Green, the stupa is a sacred symbol of enlightenment – an interface of prayer and study.

Mr Green has a five-year plan and anticipates that the stupa will attract thousands of garden-variety tourists from around the world as well as spiritual tourists. And there are plans for on site accommodation and a restaurant.

When asked how he marries the commercial with the spiritual he is sanguine. "We need a way to pay for the continual running of the stupa and tourism will help us do that."

It is an attitude entirely compatible with that of the Dalai Lama who saw the foundations of the stupa when he was in Australia in 2007.

"Support for such noble work is a good method to create virtuous karma," he said.







**WORK IN PROGRESS:** Ian Green on the site of the Great Stupa in Myers Flat. The stupa will measure 50 metres wide and 50 meters high



# Exotic paths at Atisha Centre

## DIANNE DEMPSEY

ONE of the more exotic paths to spiritual happiness, if you are on a journey, is through Buddhism.

At the Atisha Centre at Sandhurst Town Road, Myers Flat, they will tell you that at the heart of their religion there lies the principles of compassion and wisdom.

At first as you look about you may feel that Tibetan prayer wheels and the flags are at odds with the essentially robust nature of the Australian bush; but after a time you quickly realise that the birdsong is compatible with the sound of chanting and the images of Buddha entirely right next to the rocks and dry-stone walls.

The Centre embraces a large gompa or meeting room which shines with polished wooden floors, glittering candles and brass bowls. And there is the original, or little gompa, where you can go to pray for those who may be sick or dying.

There is a kitchen and dining room and a shop; and near by the

Thubten Shedrup Ling Monastery. Beyond the trees the stupa is slowly ascending. And there is of course, an office.

Before you can reach the office however you will be met by Drolma (translated in Tibetan as compassion in action).

With her wagging tail and happy bark, Drolma or Dolly is obviously filled with more joyous karma than she can cope with.

Dolly will take you to Cherry Rattue, the director of the Atisha centre. Along with many volunteers, Ms Rattue contributes to the running of this special, peaceful place.

Ms Rattue explains that the Atisha centre is a Mahayana Buddhist centre in the Tibetan tradition which follows the advice and teachings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

The centre was established more than 30 years ago under the inspiration and guidance of the two Tibetan monks, Lama Thubten Yeshe and

Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche who had fled Tibet in 1959 from Chinese persecution.

The centre is one of 150 Tibetan Buddhist centres in Australia and around the world and is dedicated to the study of Buddhism and the practice of meditation and retreat.

Cherry Rattue first came to the centre 15 years ago seeking a spiritual harbour. Today she says she has one of the best offices in the world. "I often think how lucky I am to come here each day and work in this lovely environment," she says

The centre's new accommodation is available for overnight and short stays. The Atisha Centre can be hired at reasonable rates as a venue for retreats, workshops and seminars.

Visitors are welcome to explore. Community meditations are open to the public, Sundays at 10am.

■ **Inquires can be made by phoning 5446 3336 or logging on to [www.atishacentre.org.au](http://www.atishacentre.org.au)**





**SPIRITUAL:** Cherry Rattue first came to the Atisha Centre 15 years ago

