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BET

Taverner ready to lap up life after Manuka Pool

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February 16, 2012

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John "Tav" Taverner has spent decades working at the historic Manuka Pool. Photo: karleen minney

There are few families more Canberra than the Taverners.

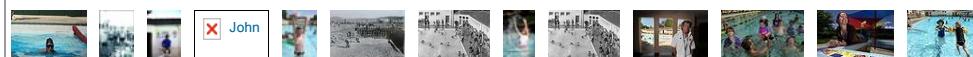
Matriarch Lesley, who turns 87 on Monday, as a little girl used to pull the whistle to alert workers to knock-off time at the Canberra Powerhouse in Kingston, where her father was an engineer. Her family had been in Canberra since 1928 and lived in a cottage on the powerhouse site.

Her late husband Owen was a legend of the Manuka pool, starting a summer lifeguarding job there in 1947 while he worked as a brickie in the winter. He then managed the pool from 1956 until 1990, becoming an important part of the Canberra institution for generations of swimmers. He worked there unofficially until 1997 and Lesley was always by his side.



Manuka pool

John "Tav" Taverner has spent decades working at the historic Manuka Pool in the business his family has had a 65 year association with. Photo: Karleen Minney



Their son John - "Tav" - has worked at the pool since 1980 and managed it for the past 22 years, becoming as familiar as its whitewashed walls and shaded gardens. But he has decided it's time to end the family's 65-year link with the art deco treasure.

And it hasn't been an easy decision.

"I've been teary a few times. I can't help myself. Always wear my heart on my sleeve, but you just know when it's time for you," he said.

Turning 60 in July and seeing some of his contemporaries die before they reached the milestone is part of his motivation. The past two seasons at the pool have also been disastrous due to the cooler weather. He was unable to draw a wage for himself for three months last year as a result of low patronage. But Mr Taverner said more than anything it was just time for a change. He and wife Pearle are moving to Moruya and he plans to perhaps get back into his former gardening career.

"I wanted to go out smiling, my head held high and proud of what I've done and want to get on with something else," he said.

Mr Taverner's sister Su Muir said she was happy her brother had reached a decision.

"I'm a bit sad though because my whole life has been this pool," she said. "As a kid, my school holidays were spent selling ice creams in the shop and swimming every day."

Mr Taverner said there were many memories from the pool, where his daughters Grace and Sophie have also worked.

Billy McMahon used to do laps at the pool during his brief prime ministership ("he was under the pump at the time").

The 1950s and 1960s were the golden days. "There were days when we'd have three deliveries of ice creams. We'd have canvas bags and dry ice, that was the fridge. And when we'd run out, my mum would have to hunt around for the Streets van and bring him down," he said.

There was the year about three-tonnes of branches fell on the wading pool on the only day of the season the pool was closed - Christmas Day.

"I thought baby Jesus is looking after me because this is the only day I'm closed. It would have been absolute chaos and devastation the day before or the day after," he said. And then there was the bloke who was trying to get even with someone seeing his sister.

"The lowest of the low down here was disarming an angry young man with a 12-inch screwdriver. That's the hardest thing I've ever had to do. I thought for a moment I was going to be stabbed," he said.

Mr Taverner also recalled one hot Sunday when an older man pulled up in a taxi and flew into the pool, later emerging from the water suitably cooled down - and resplendent in Y-fronts.

"I was just about to blast him and I went, 'You're not who I think you are, mate?' And he said, 'Yes mate, Frank Hardy'. And I went, 'Oh, what an honour'. Frank and I ended up being best mates," he said of the unorthodox author.

Mr Taverner's last day will be on March 25 when an open day will be held from 10am to 4pm, celebrating decades of friendship with his patrons. "We just want to say goodbye to the friends of the Manuka pool," he said.