

## Make new residents feel welcome in 'lucky' region

By DAVID JOHNSTON, XPRESS - 7 April 2010



Relocation consultant, Judy Ryan, right, helped Wodonga Council chief executive Gavin Cator and his wife, Leanne, move to Wodonga in 2008

(Photo by Matthew Smithwick, courtesy *Midweek Xpress*)

STATE governments can do more to encourage people to escape from the constant headaches of rising house prices, public transport dramas and general over-crowding in the city and move to places like Albury-Wodonga, according to a specialist in relocating people to the region.

As the combined population of Albury and Wodonga tracks towards 100,000, **Judy Ryan** said regional areas provided a great alternative for people and families wanting to leave the capital cities.

Once they do make the decision to leave, **Ms Ryan** says the newcomers then need to be made welcome so they don't leave.

"We have got these fantastic places in regional Victoria like Albury-Wodonga, Shepparton and Bendigo and why aren't they being pushed harder by governments?" she said.

"We've definitely got the room to accommodate them and we are pretty lucky here.

"We have a lot of facilities and are not seen as being remote, whereas Broken Hill and Cobar are seriously remote (areas) which need the doctors and educators.

"But often what happens in those places is the community really bonds together to welcome people.

"In Albury-Wodonga we can be very complacent and people have come here and then gone."

**Ms Ryan**, her husband John Riddiford and three children left the Dandenongs and moved to Wodonga in 1998 when he accepted a position with the North East Catchment Management Authority.

She started *You're Welcome Relocation Service* in 2006 and has assisted 20 families new to Albury-Wodonga with accommodation, medical services, educational enrolments for children, social networks, employment and study opportunities.

"It takes a lot of time and is quite emotional because you do get involved with these people," **Ms Ryan** said.

"The thing about what we have here in Albury and Wodonga is the bigger size and critical mass.

"With the population getting up to near 100,000 people feel like it is well serviced with things they need for their families and career progression.

"A lot of people from overseas don't want to go and live in the city again.

"People are sick of it and that is what we should be celebrating here and we really encourage it.

"My own motto is I want people to be pleasantly surprised and not easily disillusioned.

"If all members of the family are happy, they are likely to stay and new residents bring a refreshing perspective to our community."

**Ends**