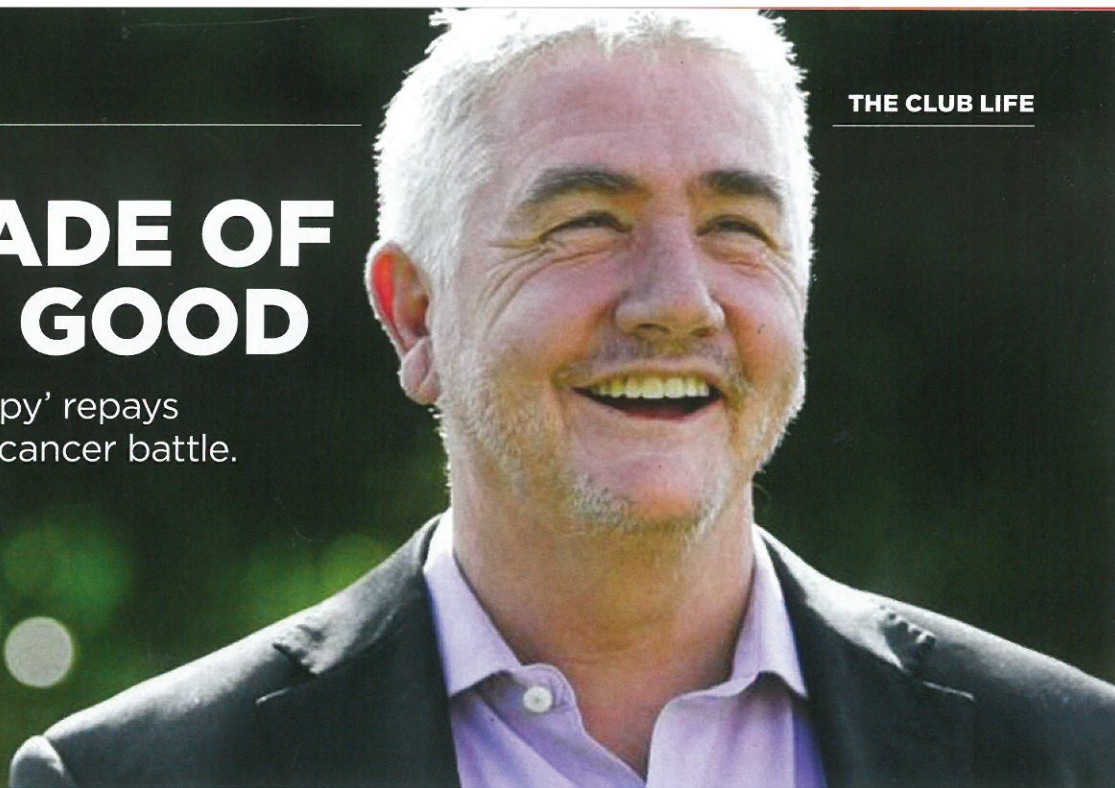


A DECADE OF DOING GOOD

Club stalwart 'Sleepy' repays the kindness after cancer battle.

BEN ROSSLEIGH
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PETER Sleep is a local institution throughout NSW Hunter region – formerly for his football prowess but more recently for his huge charitable work.

“Sleepy” played first grade rugby league for the Waratah Mayfield Cheetahs and the South Newcastle Lions in the 1980s, winning back-to-back premierships in 1988 and 1989. In retirement, he has continued to devote a large chunk of his time to the football club, with a stint as vice president, as well as maintaining the close relationship between the football club and registered club, Souths Merewether.

But Peter’s life was turned upside down in 2009 when he was diagnosed with throat cancer and had to undergo chemotherapy and radiotherapy. The local community immediately rallied around him and a special luncheon was hosted at Souths to raise funds for Sleepy, enabling the much-loved member of the community to finish his kitchen renovation and pay his mounting medical expenses.

A year later, Peter received the good news that his treatment was successful, and he became emboldened to help those who had helped him.

“Peter decided that he wanted to raise the \$10,000 that he’d been given 12 months earlier and pay it forward to the rugby league club as a thank you,” explains his wife, Robynn.

With the help of Souths and the football club, Peter and Robynn arranged for a special \$100 per ticket game-day fundraiser.

“It was a huge success. We donated \$10,000 to the football club and had money left over which we gave to the local hospital’s palliative care unit, and some other charities,” Robynn says.

The event was so successful that it became an annual event, known as Sleepy’s Day. Held on the last home game each year, the players wear special jerseys (which are auctioned off at the Club in the evening) and the event draws the biggest crowd of the footy season.

It’s followed by an official function back at Souths Merewether, where a cocktail evening which consists of finger food, drinks, entertainment and charity raffles, raises even more money.

“We’ve raised close to \$600,000 over the past 10 years, which we’ve donated to a range of worthy causes,” Robynn says. “The Club has been instrumental to that success, we wouldn’t have gotten to this point without them.

“Not only do they provide staff at the game, they provide the function space back at the Club afterwards free-of-charge, as well as staff, security and a band.

“Whenever I pick up the phone to ask them to do something, they always do it, whether that be co-ordinating the raffle items, or undertaking the marketing on social media or providing graphic design expertise.”

Robynn says it’s not just a Sleep effort as Souths stalwart David Fleming is pivotal to the success of the event. In the space of 10 years, Sleepy’s Day has grown from about 50 participants to 2000 last year, and that is expected to grow with this year’s anniversary event in August.

Going a step further, they wanted to mark the milestone with an additional charity fundraiser in March ahead of the usual August event.

The sports luncheon fundraiser held at Souths Merewether featured special guest jockey Jim Cassidy who, despite being involved in a serious head-on car crash just a week before the event, still made the trip north. Once again, the club ensured the event was a roaring success.

“The club provided free room hire, a great price for the food and drinks package, and they advertised the event on social media for us, ensuring it was a sold-out event,” Robynn says.

All efforts will now turn to the 10th Sleepy’s Day and the huge monetary contribution it will continue to provide. Most importantly, it marks almost a decade of Peter being cancer-free. ■