

Swimmers trace the strokes of Captain Thunderbolt in Cockatoo Island swim



Dawny's Cockatoo Challenge last month. Photographs by Alan Bennett David Barrett

History repeated itself in the waters off the Balmain peninsula recently as hundreds of brave swimmers retraced Captain Thunderbolt's daring escape from Cockatoo Island.

More than 300 swimmers swam to Cockatoo Island and back from Dawn Fraser pool in this year's annual Dawny to Cockatoo Swim, proving the infamous bushranger's escape in 1863 was no fluke.

Locals lined the foreshore to watch swimmers take on the tough

1.1 kilometre course or tackle the gruelling 2.3 kilometre Dawny's Cockatoo Challenge race around the island.

Now in its fourth year, the event marks the start of the ocean swim season and celebrates more than a century of history on Cockatoo Island and Dawn Fraser Baths.

Hosted by the Balmain Water Polo Club, the swimming race has grown over the years to become a unique event on the ocean swimming calendar.

Festive illumination an annual family affair

David Barrett

Every year, the Fletcher family creates a magical display of festive lights and decorations at their Darling St home and this year is no different.

Turning their terrace house into an illuminated masterpiece is a 25-year tradition for the Balmain family. Matriarch Molly Fletcher said the display was a group effort with her daughter, three sons, nine grandchildren and three children-in-law all chipping in to put up the lights.

"Once a year I ask them all around to help with the decorations," Molly said.

"Even if they aren't helping to put up the lights, the kids will climb up on the ladder and pass a hammer or a nail," she said.

"If everybody works together it takes two or three weekends. A bit of planning goes into it because we try to make it different each year."

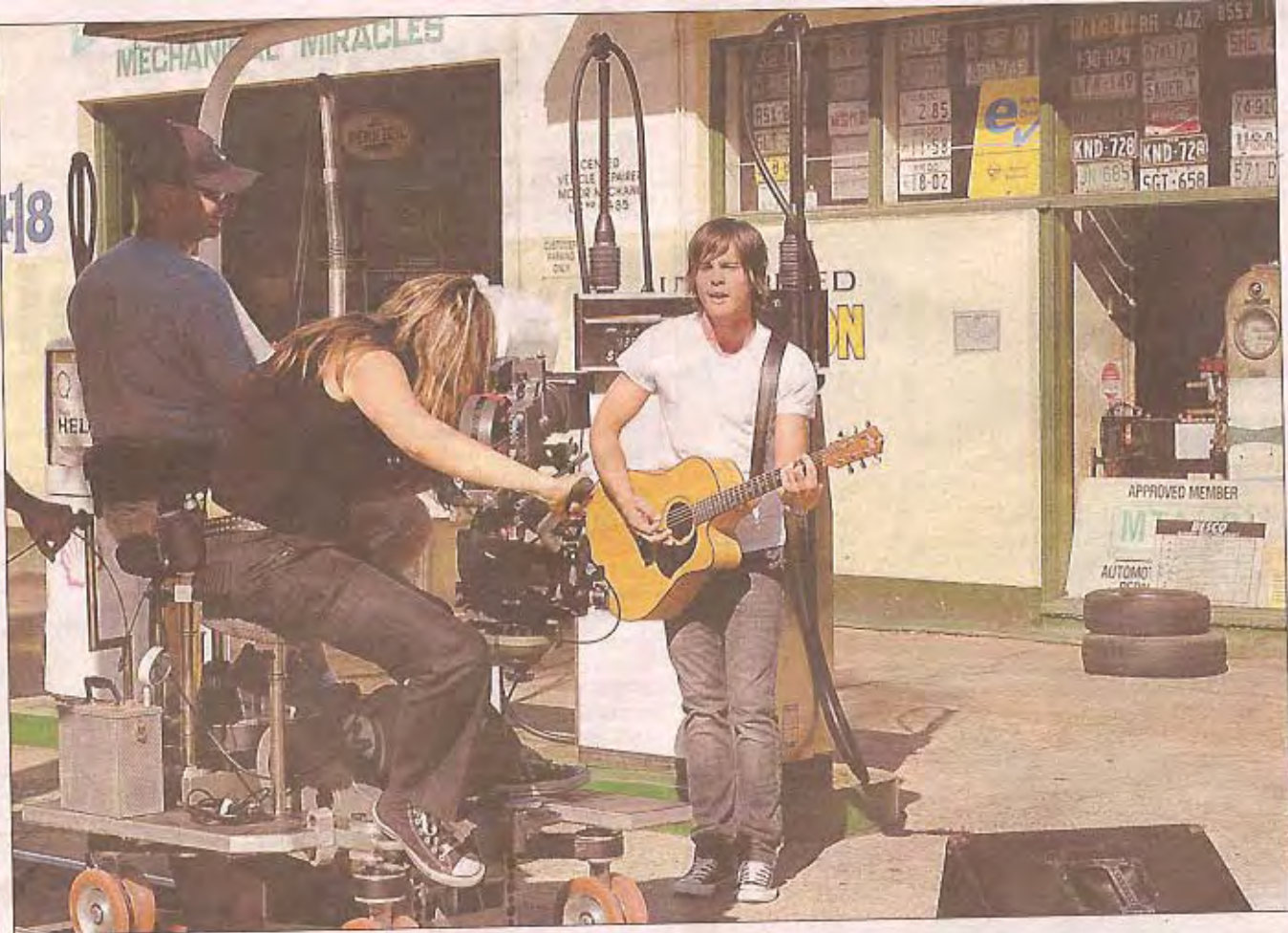
Molly said locals gather on Darling St in December and January to see the family's display.

"We put it all together to give the children a little bit of excitement. It's a family occasion. And it's mostly for us to just celebrate Christmas."

Send festive photos of your decorated house to editor@villagevoice.com.au.



Molly Fletcher has been decorating her home on Darling St since 1980. Photo by Alan Bennett



Australian Idol star Dean Geyer filming his first video clip at Bill's Garage in Balmain.

Picture: ALAN BENNETT

Bill's a star in Dean's video show