Call for statue to recognise Leongatha hero

By Brad Lester

A STATUE honouring a boy who rode from Leongatha to Sydney and back on his horse could be erected in Leongatha.

Leading the push for public recognition of Lennie Gwyther and his horse Ginger Mick is avid historian and South Gippsland Shire Councillor Bob Newton.

His call came ahead of the launch of another book about the amazing feat of nine year old Lennie in 1932.

The book, *Lennie the Legend: Solo to Sydney By Pony* by Stephanie Owen-Reeder, will be published by the National Library of Australia on February 1.

Lennie journeyed to the New South Wales capital to witness the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. His adventure captured the attention of the nation and alleviated the hardship Australians endured at the time, courtesy of the Great Depression.

Cr Newton said the feat was worth recognising, more than 80 years on.

He has not ruled out tabling a motion at a future council meeting, urging council to consider his proposal.

"I just think to go to Sydney at the age of nine years on your own is a great achievement, especially being so young on your own in the bush and..."
He did it in 33 days in 1932 - 1450 kilometres - and the road would have been a dirt track in most places.

I can remember a part of the coast road as a gravel road in the early 1960s when I hitchhiked to Queensland with my cousin at the age of 14 years.

I would love to see a statue of a horse and Lennie riding it, set up in a park. Maybe some of the service clubs could get behind this project. The Rotary Park opposite the police station would be a good place.

The story began when Lennie’s father Captain Leo Tennyson Gwyther broke his leg on his Leongatha South farm.

Lennie finished ploughing and saved the crops, and his father granted him his wish to see the bridge opening as a reward.

Leongatha North historian John Murphy, in his historical account of the Woorayl Shire, No Parallel, recorded how Leo arranged overnight stops for his son as far as Bombala in NSW. There, Leo and a neighbour caught up with Lennie in an A-Model Ford.

As word of his travels became public, people kindly offered him accommodation,” Mr Murphy wrote.

Along the way, Lennie and Ginger Mick were scared by a bush tramp, encountered a fire and harsh weather, and met Prime Minister Joseph Lyons in Canberra.

In Sydney, boy and horse were greeted by a crowd of well wishers and the Sydney lord mayor, and later took part in the bridge opening pageant.

Days later, Lennie met Australian cricket hero Don Bradman, who gave him a signed cricket bat.

Not overwhelmed by the journey north, Lennie rode home to Leongatha, arriving in June, having left in February of 1932.

His homecoming was recorded in No Parallel as: “...he was met a mile outside the town by three of the oldest residents of the district, Messrs JJ O’Reilly, CB Hamann and Charles Simon, mounted on their respective steeds.

“Escorted to the Memorial Hall by these three pioneers, Lennie was given a civic welcome by the shire president Cr RE McIndoe Junior, in the presence of a large crowd.”

Mr Murphy attended Leongatha High School with Lennie from 1936-37 and remembers him as a creative boy.

“He was brilliant at art and would top the class. He drew a vase of flowers and the teacher would show it to the class and say this is how it should be done,” he said.

Lennie died in 1992, aged 70.

The latest book follows the launch of Lennie’s Ride by Mary Small at the Leongatha Historical Society in 2010.