Wilbur's Cafe has revitalised the Hackett shops. Pictured is part owner Andrew Savoulidis and Hackett Community Association chairman James Walker. Picture: Elesa Lee

Wilbur's works wonders for shops

By Carmen McIntosh

SEVEN months ago, the Hackett shops were ''dead''.

Residents shopped elsewhere and kept to themselves, and the only time neighbours saw each other was over the fence.

''There was nothing here on this road – IGA was open, the Chinese place was open, and the hairdresser was there, and that was it,'' chairman of the Hackett Community Association, James Walker, said.

''It's always a problem if there's no centre for a suburb, especially when the school [closes], but more importantly shops, because that's where most people meet.

''It was a bit hard on people like me who grew up in country towns.''

Visit Hackett shops on a Saturday morning these days, and it's almost hard to believe. The shops brim with activity, and Mr Walker, who has lived in the suburb for three decades, now sees friends he has not seen in years.

He attributes the suburb's new lease on life to Wilbur's Café Bar, which opened at the shops in January.

''I'm here about five days a week, and I wouldn't be the only one,'' he said.

''I've been living here for 30 years and all the people that I knew that I would see here regularly when there were shops, now I'm seeing them again years and years later. They could have been dead or moved or anything for all I knew, because they would go to work, go and do their shopping, come home, have a meal, go to bed, go to work – there was nothing going on. Now I see these people.

''Just having it here has made a big morale difference – we all thought we would lose the shops entirely.''

Mr Walker said the whole suburb was experiencing a change in its demographic makeup, and he believed the café was merely a small taste of what was to come.

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