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## **Mr Bookie's Last Run**

*For immediate release – Tuesday 25 October 2011*

Half a century of passion and commitment to one's occupation is a rare achievement in this day and age.

But after an illustrious career serving the literary needs of five generations of East Gippslanders as Officer in Charge of the much-loved Mobile Library, that's exactly what local icon Keith Ridout has accomplished.

"It's been an amazing journey," Mr Ridout said recently upon reflection of his decision to hang the keys up for the last time.

Mr Ridout commenced his career as Mobile Library Operator way back in 1963. Since that time, he has endured many of life's twists, turns and bumps along the way in his beloved series of 'Betsy' busses.

"My current bookie, Betsy IV, has come to the end of its road as the East Gippsland Mobile Library," Mr Ridout said. "And after much recent discussion with my family, I've decided that the time has come for me to open a new chapter in my life as well."

Mr Ridout was awarded a Public Service Medal in 2005 for his remarkable service. Instituted by The Queen in October 1989, the award formally recognises outstanding service by public servants including those in local government. Keith's accolades have also included winning the Mobile Libraries Lifetime Achievement Award in 1999, Victorian Mobile Library Operator of the Year Award in 2001 and induction into the 'Mobile Mongrels' - a group of previous Mobile Library Operator of the Year award winners who have been recognised for their significant contributions to the profession.

Over the years, Mr Ridout has become affectionately known as 'Mr Bookie', throughout the region and beyond for his loveable character, deep community interest and legendary reliability.

He recounts being identified by East Gippslanders in places as far flung as Singapore, Katherine Gorge and Coober Pedy. "Mr Bookie, Mr Bookie!" they excitedly shouted, much to Mr Ridout's pleasant surprise.

“It’s the people that I will miss most,” Mr Ridout said when asked about the road ahead. “I have made so many wonderful friends along the way. Many have become close friends and when they pass on, it’s like losing a family member.”

Mr Ridout said that he will have plenty to do after his departure from the role. “I want to spend more time with my family. Having recently lost a close relation, I was reminded that life is short. I’m still fit and healthy, and I want to focus on my family while I still can,” Mr Ridout said.

He speaks of a long list of tasks that he hopes to complete, including a boat restoration, revisiting his stamp collection, rediscovering old books, sorting through family photos and perhaps even chronicling his memoirs in an autobiographical book.

Council Chief Executive Officer Steve Kozlowski commended Mr Ridout for his long service to the organisation. “Keith is a most revered member of staff, and we will all miss him greatly,” Mr Kozlowski said. “I, along with many other Council staff members feel privileged to have worked alongside Keith, and I believe that we can all learn something about personal integrity, customer service and humility from reflecting on Keith’s achievements,” Mr Kozlowski concluded.

Plans are underway for a suitable send-off and Keith’s ‘last run’ to take place early in the new year, with details to be announced in the coming weeks.

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