

Valley's choice: gas or the GP

By health writer
CLAIR WEAVER

RURAL residents thought their prayers had been answered when a Sydney GP made plans to become their region's first full-time doctor.

But thousands of residents could lose their only chance of local medical care because a fuel giant wants to dig up their National Trust-listed valley.

Two months after Dr Stephen List bought a 48-hectare property in the Hunter's historic Wollombi Valley, Sydney Gas revealed his site was among those marked for gas drilling.

Devastated residents, currently forced to drive for an hour or more for medical treatment, are determined to fight the controversial proposal.

Dr List, who wants to fulfil a dream to work in regional Australia, found out about the gas plans at a public meeting three weeks ago.

"It's catastrophic for the valley," he said. "It poisons the water, destroys pasture and ruins people's livelihoods."

In partnership with AGL, Sydney Gas has obtained government permits to drill, under its Hunter Gas Project.

Sydney Gas CEO Andy Lukas said it would only undertake exploratory work at one Wollombi site and was happy to accommodate



Dream: Dr Stephen List

residents' preferences.

He said it was "highly unlikely" the valley would be turned into a gas field because it was too small.

Some residents have already abandoned the valley because of the lack of medical services, with several husbands forced to deliver their wives' babies at home.

"For a doctor to come and live here is really welcome and for him to suddenly discover this on the plan, it's very disheartening for him — we all just hope the stress doesn't convince him to leave." Sean Gough, chairman of Wollombi Valley Against Gas Extraction (WAGE), said.

The nearest medical services are at Cessnock, where doctors' books are closed, meaning the sick or injured must travel to Maitland, Newcastle or Sydney to get care.



New image: Ken Done poses for the kids in his gallery

Picture: Melanie Russell

Ken brushes up on schoolwork

By MIAWLING LAM

A GROUP of school children are hoping to join Brett Whiteley and William Dobell as winners of the illustrious Archibald Prize.

The 26 pupils, aged between three and 12, are working together to paint a portrait of artist Ken Done for next year's prestigious art competition.

The group, from the NSW mid-north coast, are members of KART (Kids Are Raw Talent), a program which en-

courages children to use art as a way of improving their concentration, self-esteem and social skills.

Four KART members from Tallowood Public School busily sketched their first drafts of Done as he sat for the portrait at his Sydney gallery.

"I really like the way that nose looks like the sail of a boat," Done told eight-year-old Ashlen Farrelly.

Done said the idea was a "lovely thought".

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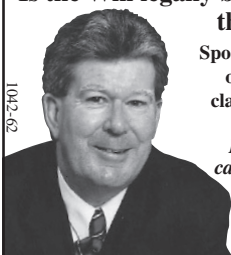
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