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ALMOST 100 years ago at Diggers Rest, renowned stunt performer Harry Houdini completed Australia's first controlled, powered flight.

With the centenary approaching in March, the community is gearing for the celebrations. Diggers Rest resident Steve Samagalski has been asked by the town's Lions Club to design a roadside billboard to mark the event.

The billboard was erected earlier this month on a side of the Calder Highway just before the entrance to Diggers Rest coming from Sunbury.

Club president Rob Mackay said he asked Mr Samagalski to design the billboard because of the work he had done for the 1st Diggers Rest Scout Group.

"It was best and cheapest deal I've ever made, Steve did it [for] free and the result is spectacular," Mr Mackay said.

Mr Samagalski, an IT manager and president of the Scouts group, was keen for the challenge, despite not having much artistic experience, except for the Scouts poster.

"The expectations of the billboard were on a scale far larger than anything I had created before," Mr Samagalski said.

"It was important to keep the banner design as simple as possible. What's easily achievable on a computer screen may have become an impossibility on a larger scale.

"I presented the design to the Lions club in August and it was enthusiastically received."

Mr Samagalski said it was great to be able to be a part of such a proud moment in history. "Houdini's flights in his Voisin biplane March 18, 1910, are recognised as the first officially recorded powered aeroplane flights in Australia," he said.

The preparation of the 6x2-metre billboard involved about 40 hours of work, and took about six weeks to complete.

"I decided to stand back and just create the impression of the plane with bold brush strokes and [made] no attempt at millimetre precision," Mr Samagalski said.

The Houdini celebrations are set for March 18-21. **Details:** www.melton.vic.gov/houdini



In full flight: Steve Samagalski besides the billboard on the Calder Highway just before the entrance into Diggers Rest. Picture: Matthew Furneaux

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