

‘Do you know Tasmania? Seniors, give it a try!’

Succeeded in starting business after immigrating later in life at age 49; ‘going overseas isn’t just for young people’

“Going global isn’t just for young people. The experience and networks of middle-aged and elderly individuals can be invaluable resources in local communities.”

Park Chan-won (70), president of the Korean Association of Tasmania and chairman of the Korean Volunteer Association, visited his homeland to attend the 2025 World Korean Association Conference, hosted by the Overseas Koreans Agency. In an interview with Yonhap News, he shared his experience of taking on the challenge of overseas immigration later in life, encouraging middle-aged and elderly individuals to pursue similar ventures abroad.

Tasmania is known as the Pure Island and boasts a pristine environment. Compared with other major cities, the cost of living is relatively low, and with a low crime rate, it is considered a safe and attractive immigration destination, especially for middle-aged and elderly people. Park emphasized it is ideal for pursuing a “slow life” away from competitive cultures, helping reduce stress and increase life satisfaction after retirement.

“The experience and expertise we have gained in Korea can be advantageous for Korean companies seeking to enter the local market or for exchange projects between Australia and Korea,” he said.

This represents an opportunity to build a second career by serving as a bridge across diverse fields, such as trade, construction and tourism.

“There are many success stories leveraging the networks of local Korean seniors,” he said, adding that middle-aged individuals designing their second act or retirees can enjoy a more relaxed lifestyle here.

‘The moment you feel it’s too late is actually the best time to start’

Despite having a stable foundation in Korea’s construction industry, Park never gave up on his lifelong dream of expanding overseas. At age 49 in 2004, he left for Australia.

His belief that “the moment you feel it’s too late is actually the best time to start” led him to begin “from the ground up.” After learning English and Australian culture at a language school, he worked as a laborer on construction sites, gaining foundational



Park Chan-won (4th from R) commemorates the installation of the previously missing Korean flag patch on the Wall of Friendship in downtown Hobart in 2015.

experience in carpentry, plastering, tiling and interior work.

After eight years of preparation, the construction company “Harmony” he founded in 2012 grew into a mid-sized enterprise encompassing building material import/export, design, construction and real estate development. It is also leading the way in introducing Korean building materials and the “ondol” heating system to Australia.

Park emphasized to Korean entrepreneurs dreaming of overseas expansion, “You cannot succeed without a deep understanding of the local market.

“There was a case where someone jumped into Tasmanian real estate development driven solely by enthusiasm, creating numerous victims and tarnishing the nation’s image. You must meticulously verify laws and regulations, understand local practices and prepare thoroughly with local advice.”

In the early days of the business, a lack of trust in Korean entrepreneurs was overcome by building a track record through the self-development and sale of townhouses. When problems arose, he responded by “meeting decision-makers directly and confronting the issue head-on” to pave the way forward.

Expanding bonds through Hangeul schools and cultural events

A businessman and leader in the Korean community, he cites “sharing and service” as his life philosophy. Having experienced hardship in his youth, he grew to understand the struggles of the



Park Chan-won, president of the Korean Association of Tasmania, Australia, stated that “sharing and service” is his life philosophy.

socially vulnerable, which naturally led to his belief in a “community that grows together.”

Just as he did in Korea, when founding the Korean Volunteer Association in Tasmania, he started with only like-minded Koreans. However, by collaborating with the local community to host Hangeul schools and cultural events, he strengthened bonds. Notably, he expanded his influence by partnering with the local Chinese community through its Chinese members.

“Though we are a small Korean community, we broadened our bonds by collaborating with the local community to host Korean language schools and cultural events. The belief that small efforts can bring about great change has borne fruit.”

He also takes the lead in promoting Korean culture every Lunar New Year. This past February, he hosted a Lunar New Year festival at Salamanca Square in Hobart, showcasing Korean culture through taekwondo demonstrations and K-food like “tteokbokki” and bulgogi.

Last Chuseok, he held an event celebrating the holiday with adopted compatriots and Korean families. They shared goods through a swap meet and fostered friendship, achieving positive results for the fifth consecutive year.

Park also fulfilled a long-cherished wish of the Korean community. At the Korean Garden, a memorial space for Korean War veterans, a Korean-language marker was erected in 2014 with support from Gapyeong County, Gyeonggi Province.

Previously, a signboard incorrectly labeled as Sea of Japan was corrected to East Sea. Additionally, the missing Taegeukgi patch

was affixed to the Wall of Friendship in the Hobart city center in 2015.

“We persistently persuaded the Australian government and local authorities, emphasizing historical facts and Korea-Australia friendship,” he said. “Regular cleanup activities and the support of veterans were our strength.”

He also said he will never forget teaching Korean to adopted compatriots so they could communicate via KakaoTalk, nor the moment they shared tears together at a veterans’ appreciation event.

Korean community’s long-awaited Korean Garden realized; pursuing its expansion into multiuse cultural space

The commitment is to continue expanding Korean traditional culture across Australia through K-pop and film exchanges, as well as hanbok experience events. Additionally, his goal is also to revitalize the Australian Korean Immigration History Compilation Committee, which aims to preserve the Korean people’s legacy for future generations while uncovering and preserving materials related to Korean War veterans. Furthermore, he plans to tightly knit a network for families of adopted compatriots to instill a sense of identity.

Park is currently advancing plans to expand the Korean Garden into a cultural complex. He is pursuing land acquisition and fundraising, aiming to establish not just a cultural space but a Korea-Australia Cultural Hub that combines a Korean Association office, Korean language school, exhibition hall and performance venue -- a place where locals and Koreans can interact.

For instance, the plan includes not only traditional Korean cultural performances and craft exhibitions but also exhibitions and performances for local Australian residents.

Park concluded by delivering a message to the next generation.

“Although I immigrated later in life and had to start from scratch, we achieved our goals by pooling our strength with fellow Koreans. The next generation has more favorable conditions. I hope you will open a brighter future through the power of togetherness.” 🙏



The next generation of Koreans showcases a taekwondo demonstration during the Lunar New Year festival in February.