

COTA Senior Achiever of the Year Awards

Nine COTA Senior Achievers of the Year recently received their awards from Minister for Senior Victorians, Lisa Neville and COTA President Janet Wood.

The COTA Awards were presented at a special event conducted at Government House on 2 October for the Victorian Government *Victorian Senior of the Year* Awards (see page 1). COTA volunteers were among those who enjoyed morning tea in the beautiful Government House gardens after the presentation.

COTA's nine Senior Achievers for 2009 were selected from a very strong field of nominations from across Victoria.

Mr Fred Kent, 81, Bentleigh East

Fred Kent, having been a valued and active member of the Royal Victorian Association of Honorary Justices for over 35 years, is now a Life Member. Fred undertakes between 35 and 40 hours voluntary work per week, visiting older people and people who are sick, to help them with documentation. He acts as an independent witness for youth or when required at a police station, and as an independent third party in interviews involving people with mental or physical disabilities. He also assists with the training of Justices, is currently undertaking training as a mediator in neighbourhood disputes, and is writing a history of the Royal Victorian Association of Honorary Justices for its 2010 centenary.

Mrs Phyllis Vaughan, 74, Warrnambool

Phyllis is a positive, supportive and energetic volunteer with a lifetime involvement in a wide range of community activities. She is the "unofficial" taxi service for older people with limited mobility, helping them with their medical appointments. She also volunteers for over 20 hours per week as the manager of the Warrnambool Red Cross shop, where she coordinates staff rosters, trains volunteers and looks after the accounts and banking. In her spare time, Phyllis makes craft items, bakes and makes preserves for charitable fund-raising events. She is an avid and successful supporter of the Warrnambool Agricultural show, and a winner of the aggregate for excellence in craft and baking skills.

Dr Malcolm Calder, 76, Steels Creek

Dr Malcolm Calder is the former Head of the School of Botany and Deputy Dean of the University of Melbourne. Since retiring Malcolm has applied his academic work in botany, conservation and natural history to benefit the broader community. He is a leading advocate for the environment, gives public talks and leads walks and activities aimed at raising community awareness of the value of the park and reserves. He is Chair of the Yarra Catchment Committee within the Port Philip and Westernport CMA, and an active member of the Healesville Environment Watch. He also provides voluntary advice and expertise to the Victorian National Parks Association and the Victorian Field Naturalist Club. After the recent bushfires, Malcolm was active in regenerating and replanting environmentally sensitive areas as well as promoting the importance of restoring native fauna and flora by using indigenous vegetation. Malcolm has been instrumental in establishing the Steels Creek Community Centre, local bushwalking groups and has lent his skills and expertise to countless ecological causes.

Mr Ken Carr, 80, Red Cliffs

Ken is an inspirational role model. He has a positive and enthusiastic outlook on life combined with a strong work ethic. This is reflected in the large amount of voluntary work he undertakes in the Mildura and Mallee region. Many years ago Ken was

asked to assist in the development of a new project called "Chances for Children". Its aim was to enhance educational opportunities for the children of Mallee. Ten years on, the program has received state and national recognition and has raised in excess of \$2 million, supporting the education pursuits of over 700 young people. He is now a voluntary project officer for Mallee Family Care's newly formed Community Development Directorate. He has campaigned and advocated on matters of Government policy relating to children in regional areas seen to be disadvantaged. He is also on the board of the Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network, a Victorian State Government funded organisation which provides pathways between education and employment for 15 to 19 year olds across Sunraysia.

Mrs Thelma Mansfield, 76, Moorabin

Thelma Mansfield was awarded a Centenary Medal for her outstanding contribution to the Moorabin, Kingston and Glen Eira communities. Thelma dedicates her time to volunteering in a number of organisations including The Children's Protection Society, where she counsels victims of sexual abuse, and Meals on Wheels, delivering hot meals to less mobile members of our community. Thelma also works in aged care, but in her spare time supports isolated older people by making home visits and taking them to their doctor. She takes a keen interest in council affairs that reflect on community issues, advocates for seniors on legal matters and actively encourages seniors to engage socially and physically.

Mr Alan Kneebone, 75, Shepparton

Since retiring from the Victorian Department of Education, Alan has made an outstanding contribution to a number of organisations including the Shepparton Probus club, the Golf Club and the Croquet Club, but his main passion has been the Ave Maria Community Village. Alan's involvement with the establishment and maintenance of the gardens is inspirational. The City of Greater Shepparton was so impressed with Alan's work that the Village was presented with the coveted award of best community garden. Alan also gives generously of his time as a bus driver, taking Seniors to social events. Alan has worked with the Dhurringile Prison to assist prisoners nearing release integrate back into society. Prisoners work alongside Alan and the gardening team each week in order to boost their self esteem. Alan's involvement resulted in him being recognised by the Department of Corrective Services.

Mr Bill McPherson, 83, Seabrook

Bill's attitude to life is not only inspirational but contagious. Bill has contributed greatly to the Hobsons Bay and Altona communities with the establishment and unification of several Men's sheds in the West. Men's sheds are huge assets to local communities, contributing to mental health, engagement and social wellbeing. Two years ago, Bill founded the Around Altona Community Newspaper as a "voice" for residents and to raise funds for the Altona Men's Shed Projects. He did the first issue on his own, by hand, printing, folding and stapling 1000 copies of a 24 page newsletter. The paper is now an asset to local residents. Bill is also the brainwave behind the Westage Computer Group. The group collects old computers from industries, repairs and upgrades them and distributes them to schools or individuals. Hundreds of people, especially older members of the community have benefited.

Mrs Winifred Hamlyn, 86, Nhill

Winifred is an inspirational community member, and an outstanding volunteer in the Nhill area. Win visits older people in hospital, entertains at aged care facilities and inspires others to seek an active and fulfilling life. She has been a member of the Country Womens Association for over 30 years and in that time has held various

positions. More recently she was involved in distributing drought relief packs to women throughout rural Australia. She also plays an integral part in Coinda, the centre for the disabled. Commencing as a teacher, assisting her clients to plan, prepare and cook meals on a weekly basis, she is now President of the Auxiliary. The Lowana Drop in Centre, the Red Cross, the Blind Auxiliary and the Nhill Agricultural and Pastoral Society are just some of the other organisations that benefit from Win's charitable work.

Mrs Merle Hall, 79 years, Bendigo

Across many facets of community life, Merle has used her skills and professional approach to progress a wide range of community projects. As a fearless and intensely passionate individual, the Greater Bendigo and Loddon Campaspe communities have felt the impact of Merle's work over decades. Merle has served on countless boards and committees during her lifetime. Most significantly, she has been a driving force for the Loddon Campaspe Centre Against Sexual Assault, tirelessly working to make a positive difference in people's lives. As a key figure in the Bendigo arts community, she was pivotal in the development of The Capital Theatre as Bendigo's Regional Arts Centre, a space which now attracts many influential professional and amateur performance groups to the area.

Congratulations to all COTA's Senior Achievers for 2009.