



TRIBUTE *to* OUR HEROES



We salute the unsung heroes who do extraordinary things in our community

THE Pride of Australia medal honours everyday Australians who do extraordinary things in our communities.

They are the unsung heroes whose contribution to the Australian way of life is not widely known or recognised.

Through their achievements these remarkable Australians inspire us to make our communities a better place to live.

More than 700 Victorians were nominated for the awards.

A panel of judges have chosen the Victorian winners and finalists for the 10 medal categories.

Winners and finalists will be honoured at an award ceremony at the MCG today. Winners will be named in tomorrow's *Herald Sun*.



OUTSTANDING BRAVERY

Yorin Miller and John Kendrick

As with thousands of other CFA volunteers, Yorin Miller and John Kendrick gave their all during the devastating Black Saturday fires that ravaged Victoria. But when the two firefighters arrived at Wandong fire station, they had no idea they would be sent to face one of the country's worst natural disasters. Asked to support a bulldozer driver who was creating firebreaks, Yorin and John were caught in intense fire. Battling poor visibility and extreme conditions, the pair risked their lives to rescue the driver from danger. His bulldozer was later found burnt out.

Ben Frichot

Ben Frichot is not the type to run from danger. After seeing a woman trapped inside a burning car on the side of the road, the 30-year-old CFA volunteer knew there was only one thing to do. Other motorists drove by, but Ben pulled over and rushed to help. Unable to open the crumpled front door, he accessed the woman through a rear door while flames lashed out at him, leaving burn marks on his clothes. The woman's legs were twisted around the pedals and the remnants of the melted dash, so Ben worked to free her from the car. Once free, he carried her to safety and waited with her until emergency services arrived. Minutes later, the car exploded.



Christopher Wilson

Chris Wilson is a reluctant hero. Despite living in Eltham, Chris, 23, has been a dedicated CFA firefighter with a strong connection to the Narbethong area. On Saturday, February 7, while sheltering with several others in the safety of Mary's bunker, a former supermarket storeroom at the rear of an outdoor hire shop, Chris heard a woman and her dog next door pleading for help. Unflinchingly, he put his own life at risk and ran next door to their rescue. She was standing there, petrified and unable to move. But Chris managed to coax her to the safety of Mary's bunker, saving her life in the process.

EMERGENCY SERVICES



Raymond Rickards

Raymond Rickards has devoted his time to being a CFA volunteer firefighter for five decades. He has attended all major Victorian fires including Ash Wednesday and the devastating Black Saturday fires. He was awarded the National Fire Medal in 1982 and last year received a CFA bravery award after rescuing an unconscious man from his burning house. Raymond says the conditions inside the house made it nearly impossible to find the missing man. At the time, he said he agonised over whether he could have done more. The Chief Officer Commendation award followed 25 years service as a first lieutenant and four years as a brigade captain.



Peter Robinson

When fire resources were stretched to the limit on Black Saturday, Peter Robinson was faced with using equipment that was taken out of service 20 years ago. With fires breaking out around him at Kilmore East, his firefighting expertise and bravery proved invaluable. Working almost 30 hours without a break, he provided local knowledge to incoming crews, despite knowing friends had been lost in the fire. During the fires, Peter was always looking for methods to improve response efforts to ensure the community was not left without sufficient fire support. In the days that followed, he focused on ways to improve the service in order to provide a better standard of firefighting and prevention to the community.



Ian Hamill and Andrew Walker

Ian Hamill and Andrew Walker are not only good mates, they are hero police officers who saved hundreds of people as an inferno devastated Marysville during the Black Saturday firestorm. The pair were on call when fires took hold across the state and they were swung into action. Realising Marysville would be devastated by the fast-approaching blazes, they made a life-or-death decision to pull families from houses and persuaded dozens to abandon plans to defend their homes and flee. As embers and smoke started to choke the town, they also convinced more than 100 people who had gathered at the oval to evacuate.



COMMUNITY SPIRIT

Kay Radford

After 40 years of doing good there isn't much Kay Radford hasn't turned her hand to. Through her work, the tireless community volunteer has been involved with kindergarten committees, school programs and has even personally cared for a young muscular dystrophy sufferer. As an inaugural member of the Ronald McDonald Ball Committee, Kay has helped contribute hundreds of thousands of dollars to the Ronald McDonald House program that provides homes for the families of critically-ill children across the country. Together with her local Rotary group, Kay helped raise \$2.4 million for a similar service in Gippsland.

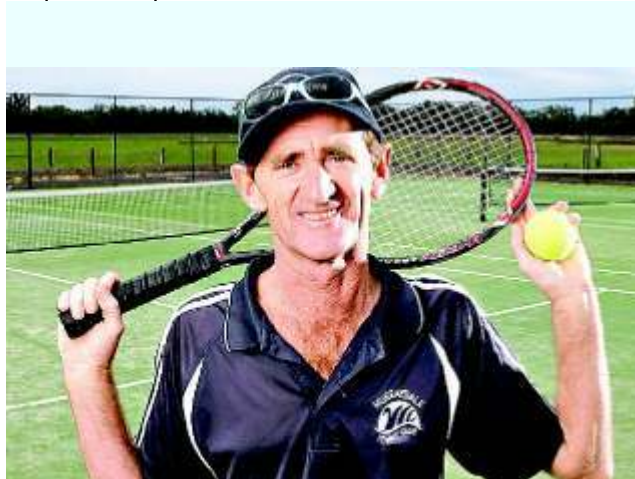


Boris Struk

The world was only vaguely aware of muscular dystrophy when Boris Struk's son Ryan was diagnosed with an aggressive form of the disease as a child. Awareness had slowly progressed from the 1950s, but Boris realised not enough was being done when doctors told him that Ryan's muscles would waste away and he would die within 10 years. So, with the intention of helping others in the same situation, Boris, 58, formed the Muscular Dystrophy Association. Over 20 years, he has turned it into a successful non-profit organisation which has raised more than \$20 million and provided more than 350,000 hours of respite to those affected by the disease. "I recall my first day on the job as a volunteer ... the enormity of the task ahead quickly struck me when all I could find for a chair was an old orange crate. But we have come a long way since then," he says.

John Hopkins

Dedication to small-town spirit was behind John Hopkins' drive to build Victoria's first new tennis club in more than 10 years. In the small northwestern town of Murraydale, with a population nudging 60, the drought has put a dent in the pride of an area doing it tough with a lack of rain and irrigation water. To boost morale, John donated land for tennis courts, built them without funding and enrolled the new club in the local association. The response from the community has been so strong the club already has 90 members and has just won the premiership in its first season.





CHILD OF COURAGE

Tate Kemp

Tate Kemp, a gutsy seven-year-old with cerebral palsy, has inspired thousands. For the past three years, Tate has tackled two marathons a year in his walker to raise money to get other children with cerebral palsy up and mobile. At Tate's first event, the 2007 Melbourne Marathon, he and his team raised more than \$13,000 for the Cerebral Palsy Education Centre in Glen Waverley. The Tate '08 team last year raised a similar amount. "If kids like me can do it, it will show other kids that they can do it as well," he says. Tate aims to be a positive, fun-loving role model so that others accept and embrace people with disabilities.



Caleb Neyenhuis

Caleb Neyenhuis, 7, has come a long way since he lost his eyes to a brave battle with cancer four years ago. He is now enjoying his second year at school and mum Danielle says he continues to inspire everyone around him. "He has a go at all things that are available to him," she says. "Every day he amazes me with what he does and remembers. He has a fantastic smile that captures your heart. A simple act of jumping and a hop cracks him up, and he never takes anything for granted."



Brennan Houghton

After being diagnosed with osteosarcoma – a rare form of bone cancer – in April last year, Brennan was forced to battle eight months of brutally aggressive chemotherapy. The pressure of the tumour on his spinal cord developed so quickly he could no longer walk or stand. Combined with an emergency operation to remove the tumour and replace his vertebrae with metal rods and bolts, Brennan spent more than four months in hospital and was unable to attend school for the year. He is now back at school, living every day to the fullest and has never once complained about what continues to be a daily battle. An inspiration to all who know him, he has taught himself to walk, run and ride his bike again and come through smiling at the end of it all.



CARE AND COMPASSION

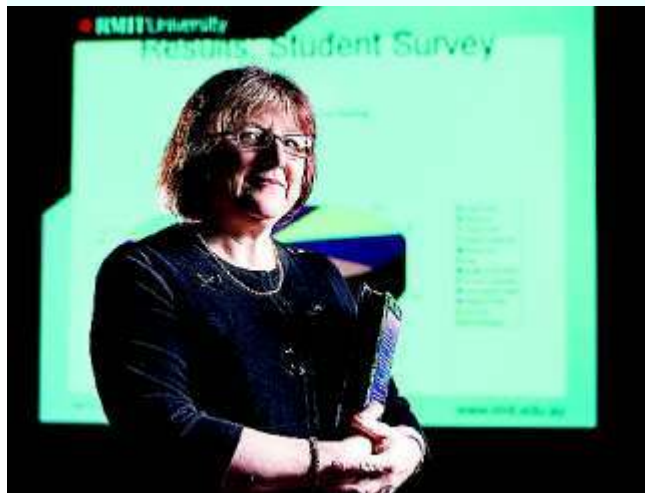
George Kannourakis

In an area where public transport is limited, Ballarat's favourite oncologist, Prof George Kannourakis, has returned good old-fashioned service to his patients. Instead of getting cancer patients to come to him, he lightens the load by driving to his patients every fortnight. The professor is more than happy to take his work home with him, often working above and beyond what his patients expect of him. Patients say he refuses to rush, is always smiling and is always pleased to be helping in any way he can.



Karen Nankervis

Changing the lives of people living with a disability has always been the driving force for Associate Prof Karen Nankervis. She has tirelessly dedicated almost three decades to providing support to people with disabilities. Part of this support comes in the form of research and education. In her leading role in Disability Studies at RMIT University in the past 20 years, she has taught more than 600 graduates who now work in the broader disability services sector, passing on to the community all that she has taught them.



Diane Harrison

During the past 20 years, 63-year-old Diane Harrison has helped raise more than 100 children. The single mother raised four adopted children, all of different nationalities, including two with Down syndrome. At the same time she fostered more than 100 children, some for only a matter of weeks, others for many years. Daughter Kobie Metherell says some children never knew love before joining the Harrison home. "She gave me a loving, caring, happy childhood ... she didn't give birth to me but she certainly gave me life. She is great at helping children with disabilities to reach their full potential and caring for those that others won't," she says.



YOUNG LEADER

Sarah Thomas

Sarah Thomas is as passionate about helping her local community as she is about helping the international community. Between school and study, the year 10 Sandringham College student has helped everyone from the young to the aged. She is involved in her local youth services committee through which she has organised alcohol, drug and smoke-free events for adolescents in the Bayside municipality. Since 2007, she has also been a peer support mentor to young students, guiding and assisting them through tough times. On an international level, Sarah is a World Vision delegate for the Trek Against Trafficking campaign, and is one of the 150 young people across the nation to be awarded this position. She has actively been lobbying for the campaign.

Kate Smith

Kate Smith endured her first major operation when she was only five days old. Born with neuroblastoma, a rare form of cancer, an operation to remove most of the tumour left her with permanent nerve damage to her left leg. Since then, the tiny battler decided life was for living, and giving. During her school years in Queensland Kate supported several charities including World Vision, the Red Cross, the Cancer Council and Guide Dogs, and was the founding member of her school's Amnesty International Committee. Having moved to Melbourne in 2005, Kate has continued to support many environmental, social justice and humanitarian causes. On top of studying at Melbourne University Kate has taught English to adult migrants, worked in the St Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen, assisted with the Regent Honeyeater Project revegetation program, and helped create wildlife corridors for sugar gliders and possums.





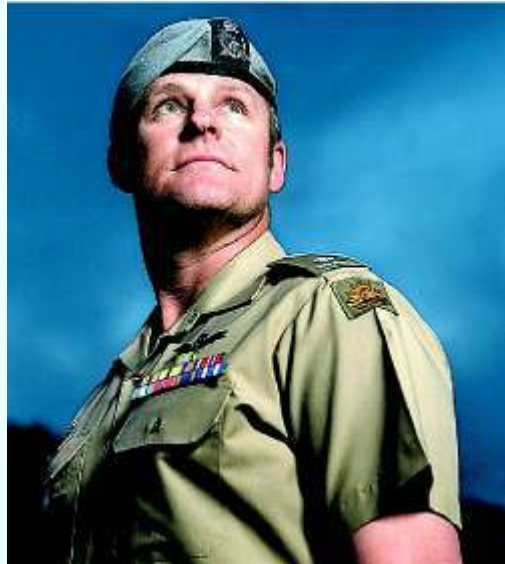
Richard Colman

He may be in a wheelchair, but Richard Colman refuses to sit around waiting for life to happen – instead he gets in there and takes all it has to offer. Born with spina bifida, Richard has refused to let the disability stand in his way. At 24 years old, he is a two-time Paralympics medallist, having represented Australia at the Athens and Beijing Games, bringing back a swag of medals. In 2007, he created history as the first person to umpire a football game from a wheelchair. Now Richard is passing on his passion for sport to help other disabled athletes overcome the perceived barriers of living with a disability. He has instigated training programs for them at his local gym, established a wheelchair training camp to encourage developing athletes and developed a family adventure camp with the Spina Bifida Foundation of Victoria.

SERVING AUSTRALIA

Hayden Archibald

Not happy to sit back and let other people do all the hard work, Hayden Archibald has taken the War on Terror into his own hands. Hayden and his family moved to Tennessee two years ago so he could complete an exchange pilot program with the US Army. One year into his posting, Hayden was sent to Afghanistan for a 12-month deployment while his daughter, Mia, 1, and his wife stayed in the US. The only Australian serving with the US military, Hayden suffered a loss when a co-pilot was shot and killed during a combat mission. Serving in Afghanistan, he was awarded an American Air Medal, bestowed for acts of heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy.





INSPIRATION

Joanne Larkin

For 15 years, Joanne Larkin has been a teacher, coach, mentor and role model to kids and young adults with an intellectual disability. Among her many coaching roles, she is head coach of the Victorian Metropolitan Women's Intellectually Disabled Basketball Team and assistant coach of the national team. Jo, 36, also mentors young referees and runs school-holiday clinics for disabled athletes. "When you teach a kid with low self-esteem and no confidence to catch a ball and shoot a basket and they start achieving it, that's when you think you've made a difference," she says.



Sue McNamara

Sue McNamara still loves learning, even after 40 years in teaching. Whether it's tackling the flying fox and giant swing at school camp or embracing new technology, Sue, 60, is up for anything. "When you look at the world through the eyes of kids, it's entirely different from the jaded, cynical outlook most of us have. It just reminds you how fabulous things can be," she says. Sue was nominated for a Pride of Australia inspiration medal for her dedicated work as a year-level co-ordinator, curriculum co-ordinator, member of the leadership team and former editor of the school magazine.

Scott Jennens

The ability of Scott Jennens to get through to the toughest of kids has seen him become a life-long mentor to many of his former pupils. Working at the Leaps and Bounds Development Centre, Scott works with students who have displayed severe social and emotional problems in mainstream schools. But whatever the problem, his rapport with his students has enabled him to bring the best out of all his students. Scott puts extensive teaching experience and behaviour-management expertise to best use to ensure he connects with every student on a personal level. Former students recall with fondness how he dramatically changed their lives and others still seek his trusted advice and guidance. Peers describe him as inspirational.





ENVIRONMENT

Veronica Burgess

Thanks to the hard work and dedication of Veronica Burgess, the people of Sunbury will be able to enjoy the Evans St Wildflower and Grassland for many years to come. At one stage, the parkland was earmarked for a car park. Because of Veronica's commitment to the cause she became actively involved with an advisory committee to Hume Council on the environment and sustainability and with Sunbury Conservation Society. After 17 years of campaigning to preserve the area, Veronica was thrilled when the local council placed a permanent covenant on the site. Recently, the site was recognised as being of national significance.



David Burrell

Furry, feathered or scaled, a native animal in danger can be sure David Burrell will be on hand 24 hours a day to come to the rescue. Known by many as the Roo Whisperer, David has spent 20 years rescuing and rehabilitating Australia's native wildlife. Working between Melbourne and Warrnambool, he has helped save more than 30,000 animals. He is so passionate about his cause he spends six days a week training volunteers in the intricacies of wildlife rescue.

Suzanne Magann

To her friends and family, 11-year-old Suzanne Magann is known as the Wildlife Warrior. She is so dedicated to the preservation of the environment that she wrote letters to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Environment Minister Peter Garrett to express her concerns. Suzanne spends her spare time raising money for wildlife causes, campaigning in her local community and getting her hands dirty doing the work she knows has to be done. Last year, she raised more than \$2000 for whale research and gathered 600 signatures for a petition to stop a mining project she says would endanger wildlife.





FAIR GO

Emilio Fiorenza

As a volunteer worker and advocate for more than 30 years, Emilio Fiorenza has initiated many ideas for programs that meet the cultural and diverse needs of people from all walks of life and ethnic backgrounds. His vision is to create community networks that provide opportunities for all to share the rich cultural diversity that exists in the community. He fulfils this vision through his role as a teacher, artist, community leader and advocate. He has also educated community groups about the needs of ethnic children in various school environments.



Adel Asaid

Dr Adel Asaid has spent the past four years working tirelessly to ensure the people of his small country town receive the medical support they deserve. When Elmore's only hospital was closed in 2005, Adel was recruited to establish and operate the Elmore Primary Health Service practice out of the hospital premises. Initially only supported by an office assistant, Adel looked beyond Elmore and started making medical services available in neighbouring towns including Boort, Pyramid Hill, Lochington and Rochester. He now has nine doctors working within his area, providing a much-needed health service to a formerly service-starved population.



Eileen Pica

A tough upbringing in England inspired Eileen Pica to help those going through tough times whenever she could. After migrating to Australia in 1963, Eileen raised four children while studying and working full-time, and dedicated any spare time to volunteering in her local community. After working in the rehabilitation services industry for 16 years, Eileen was appointed CEO of Access Employment Sunraysia, an employment service aimed at helping people with disabilities join the workforce. Retiring five years ago, she has since dedicated herself to extra community work despite an ongoing battle with sleep apnoea. Friends describe her as a great role model to her family, friends and community who treats everyone the same and often champions the underdog, always willing to represent people who cannot represent themselves and don't have a voice that is heard.



Love, loss drive search for a cure

August is Spinal Muscular Atrophy awareness month. But what is SMA? ELISA MILLER spoke to Julie Cini, chief executive of the Spinal Muscular Atrophy Association of Australia, who hopes to lift the profile of SMA, a rare genetic disease that kills about one child a month.

IN 2005 when her daughter Montana was diagnosed with Spinal Muscular Atrophy type 1, Berwick resident Julie Cini felt her world had stopped.

With no available resources on the degenerative disease Julie felt helpless.

"When someone tells you 'take your child home to love because there is nothing that can be done' — that's just the most incomprehensible information you can hear as a parent."

SMA is a genetic motor neuron disease present in adults and children. Depending on how severely they are affected, some children with the disease never walk, sit or stand unaided.

After the death of Montana in 2005, at only ten months old, Julie and her husband Ross wanted to help other parents facing similar ordeals and started the Spinal Muscular Atrophy Association of Australia.

"I have to revisit what happened to me every day but there is no one else. These families need to know what is going to happen to their children."

Tragically in 2006, when Julie was 13 weeks pregnant with their second child, Ross was killed in a car accident.

When her second daughter Zarlee was born in December 2006, doctors again diagnosed type 1 SMA.

Zarlee passed away on Christmas Day, 2007, only weeks after her first birthday.

Julie believes it is her family's legacy that drives her to educate about SMA and fight for government-funded genetic testing.

"I choose to get up each day and to make a difference — not just for the kids with SMA but for all women... to show them they are able to live after the loss of a child. This is the legacy that Ross and my girls have left and I'm just facilitating it.

"It's lovely for me to be able to talk about my family every day because they are always in my heart."

Julie says public awareness is a huge challenge.

"Everyone knows what breast cancer is, but if you ask people what the number one genetic killer of kids under

two is, they wouldn't know it is SMA.

"This is not something a child catches. It is something that about one in 30 people carry the recessive gene for."

When both partners have the SMA gene, there's a one in four chance of having an affected child.

Via SMAAA funding, a University of Western Australia research team is working on gene therapy technology in the hope of finding a cure.

Julie says early genetic testing is vital and is petitioning the Federal Government to introduce such a test.

"We just want to get the message out there that we can prevent this with a test.

"I will work until I get it — I didn't lose my girls for nothing to happen and the amount of families losing their children every month just drives me."

August is SMA awareness month, culminating with a charity gala dinner on Saturday, August 29. Tickets: 9768 9052 or visit www.smaaustralia.com



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Above: Julie Cini, with association employees Lyn Fisher, Michelle Brandt and Rachel Brodsky, and images of Montanna and Zarlee.
Picture: Marco De Luca



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