

Tuesday 12 May 2015

AWARDS RECOGNISE GREAT WORK OF VOLUNTEERS

In a night of celebration, thirty-two individuals and groups nominated by their peers for the annual City of Ryde Volunteer Recognition Awards, were honoured at a Civic Centre ceremony to thank them for their outstanding service to the community.

The Mayor Cllr Bill Pickering said: “The work of volunteers make our community better and stronger.

“It is not an understatement to say that this army of volunteers are our unsung heroes. They are the lifeblood of many, connecting people, improving lives, extending a helping hand, or simply a warm smile.

“They give their time, skill and energy so generously to those in need, many the most vulnerable in our society, ensuring that services are delivered and that help is not far away.

“Volunteers improve the lives of countless fellow citizens, and strengthen the economic and social well-being of our entire community. It is an honour to be in their company.”

The Mayor also paid tribute to those who nominated the volunteers for the Awards, as without their action the work of individuals and groups could go unrecognised.

In making the announcements, the Mayor said that choosing winners from such a distinguished and deserving group was an unenviable task.

City of Ryde 2015 Volunteer of the Year Winners

NORA ETMEKDJIAN – Volunteer of the Year

For more than ten years, Nora Etmekdjian has volunteered with a host of community organisations, committing hundreds of hours of service every year. These organisations include West Ryde Chamber of Commerce (Treasurer since 2009), West Ryde Easter Parade, Eastwood and West Ryde Events Committees, Red Cross, Country Women’s Association, Rotary (Community Services Chairperson since 2011), Ryde Eisteddfod, Historic Houses Trust, Historic Addington House, Mary Mackillop Place, Christian Heritage Committee and most recently, Neighbourhood Watch.

Nora has held the position of Treasurer at West Ryde Chamber of Commerce since 2009 and has taken a leading role in growing the West Ryde Easter Fair, committing 4 – 6 months each year to expand its appeal.

The West Ryde Chamber of Commerce makes significant contributions to the community of West Ryde as well as economic development for the area. Nora has encouraged many place making events such as the 2014 Shopfront Sculpture Trail, Carols in the Village Square, and the Easter Parade and Fair which is now an established annual event.

Nora's motivation is to increase the potential of people living and working in the City of Ryde to be involved in community activities, to connect with one another and contribute to society.

Nora's involvement with the Country Women's Association is well known to many. She was the treasurer from 2009 - 2011 and prepared the financial reports as a requirement of the organisation. Her hourly involvement increases dramatically for special events or projects such as Trash and Treasure, BBQ at Bunnings, the bi-monthly Craft Day and the CWA stall at Granny Smith.

Nora began her association with the Red Cross and Red Shield Appeal as a collector and has increased her involvement and since 2011 has been coordinating students and Rotarians to work together to collect for Red Shield Appeal. This year she is working with the Salvation Army to encourage the community's participation in this good cause.

Helping others; creating a better community; providing a sense of satisfaction in knowing that she has helped shape her community; making friends and associations with her local community – these are Nora Etmekdjian's rewards.

Nora works full time. She is the wife of a City of Ryde Councillor, and still finds spare time for the above volunteer roles.

She is described as highly organised and uses her time efficiently. She is always friendly and willing to help others wherever possible.

Nora shows commitment, passion and enthusiasm – the key qualities of an exemplary volunteer and an admirable person.

BEN LOPEZ – Young Volunteer of the Year

Twenty-one year old Ben Lopez joined the NSW State Emergency Service Ryde Unit aged 17, and since then has dedicated 8 to 10 hours a week to the organisation.

He displays total commitment to his role, attending regular weekly training, evening and weekend courses, community events and travelling outside of the area to provide assistance when needed.

Ben has shown consistent maturity beyond his years and is a key member of the Ryde Unit. This was recognised at the completion of his first year of service when he was awarded the annual SES Ryde Unit Carey Bell Shield (2012) as the Most Outstanding Probationer.

In a recent survey of service hours put in by SES Unit members involved in field emergency work, Ben was top of the list as giving the most hours to help his community.

Ben's maturity is practically demonstrated by the keys positions he holds in the SES Ryde Unit:

- Truck driver and currently training as a Floodboat Operator which are positions limited to outstanding individuals.
- Duty Officer - a 24/7 role responsible for all of the City of Ryde in storm and flood emergencies. This requires constant mobile phone and computer monitoring and organising the SES Ryde Volunteers and resources in emergencies.
- He is often seen at Community Engagement events providing education to residents on how to be more resilient in emergencies.
- At some SES community engagement events Ben has responded well to the opportunity to develop his leadership qualities by being Event Leader which involves organising and leading a team of up to 10 volunteers.
- Ben freely gives his time to assist in the set up at community events including the Granny Smith Festival, Christmas Carols at Ryde Common and Clean up Australia.

Ben Lopez is an outstanding role model to both young and older member of the community.

ARTISANS RYDE Volunteer Group of the Year

Artisans Ryde is a non-profit group founded in 2010 and now numbers around 30 artists. Their passion for art brings them together to share and grow as a community helping create vibrant and colourful neighbourhoods.

Their aim to create original and innovative art in a nurturing, community environment and to showcase the works of artists of all backgrounds through markets, exhibitions, workshops and demonstrations, gained the support of the City of Ryde Council in 2013 which has led to a series of workshops, markets and collaborations for the community.

Their Arts Activation Ryde is an exciting grass-roots program designed to bring together women from diverse cultural backgrounds to share their stories, create art and form new friendships.

These successful, three-hour workshops are held every month with a different featured artist demonstrating their skill and encouraging the participants to create something new and beautiful.

Their coordinator said the aim of the project is to help build healthier communities using art as a powerful medium for human expression because the language of art speaks to everyone.

Other successful ventures have been regular artists markets that coincide with high profile community events such as the West Ryde Easter Fair and Parade, Shopfront Sculpture Trail, Christmas, and Social Inclusion Week activities.

Artisans Ryde welcomes new members and provide a social outlet for budding artists through their workshops and markets as well as arts education.

MARK HANLEY - Special Commendation Award

Mark Hanley has served the Royal Rehabilitation Centre as a volunteer chaplain for the past 40 years, providing pastoral care to residents with severe disabilities.

His ongoing and reliable support ensures that residents who have no family have committed, regular visits, alternatively, allowing family members some respite time if needed.

His compassion and practical hands-on assistance help alleviate a sense of isolation many residents feel, providing them meaningful engagement with someone from the community who will always listen, encourage and discuss life's challenges.

The residents, families, carers and staff of Royal Rehab appreciate Mark's commitment and are grateful beyond words for the work he does.

The role of a Chaplain/Pastoral visitors at the Royal Rehab is described as "providing care by contributing to a supportive atmosphere, conducive to spiritual, emotional and physical healing", but Mark's unique capacity to connect with people and be non-judgemental whatever the circumstance, makes him more like 'extended family', an educator, counsellor and friend.

Mark is described as the "go-to" person when someone is needed to step in and assist or relieve another team member.

When asked what he gets from his vocation, Mark replies: "I get a lot more out of it than I put in". Then adds that he feels a sense of privilege, a better understanding of people, a deep level of satisfaction in providing support to those who lack a voice and that volunteering gives him hope for the future and gratitude for the present.

Contact: Lee Kirkland City of Ryde Media Officer 9952 8083 0434 306 444
lkirkland@ryde.nsw.gov.au