

City of Ryde

Media Release

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2010 Australia Day Ambassador Nick Gleeson Invites You To “Explore The World Without Sight”

Athlete, accessibility advocate and global adventurer Nick Gleeson is this year’s City of Ryde Australia Day Ambassador.

“We are honoured to welcome Nick Gleeson as Ambassador at this year’s Australia Day celebrations,” said Mayor, Cllr Michael Butterworth.

“Nick is a remarkable role model who has overcome the challenges of living with blindness to follow his dreams. These include an academic career, twice competing in the New York City Marathon and leading an expedition named Blind Ambition to climb Mount Kilimanjaro in Africa.

“Nick’s down to earth nature and ability to convey a serious message – with warmth, humour and honesty – has made him a popular public speaker and highly successful advocate for Vision Australia.”

As Guest Speaker at the Australia Day Ceremony and Concert, Nick Gleeson will invite the audience to expand their horizons and join him as he “explores a world without sight”.

For full details on Australia Day activities go to www.ryde.nsw.gov.au/australiaday

Attachment: Nick Gleeson biography and photo
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City of Ryde 2010 Australia Day Ambassador Nick Gleeson

Nick Gleeson invites you to explore a world without sight!

Over the past decade, athlete, accessibility advocate and global adventurer Nick Gleeson has built up an enviable reputation for public speaking. Nick has that rare gift of being able to convey a serious message – that of overcoming the challenges of living with blindness – with warmth, humour and honesty.

He was born in the working-class Melbourne suburb of Broadmeadows in the 1960s, back when a cricket bat was a piece of wood borrowed from a fence.

Nick's life changed forever at age seven when an electronic swinging supermarket door hit him on the side of his head, causing a retinal detachment.

The youngest of seven, Nick experienced a lot of love and loss in his early years. His brother Maurice also became blind at the age of 13 while another, Russell, died at age 23.

He attended a boarding school for children who were blind and was one of the first of his peers to finish Year 12. Nick went on to complete a Bachelor of Arts at Melbourne University – no mean feat considering the difficulty a person who is blind faced in accessing information back then.

Despite his academic achievements, Nick's great passion has always been sport and adventure. He has represented Australia in athletics on three occasions, racing in America, England and Hong Kong. He also played blind cricket (much like the traditional game, but using an audible ball) for almost 20 seasons, representing Victoria, New South Wales and Australia.

Much of Nick's success as a speaker is down to his ability to bring his sporting and travel adventures to life. These include twice crossing the finish line in the New York City Marathon, carrying the Sydney Olympic Torch, racing up the 1,576 steps of the Empire State Building and completing the gruelling 90km from Durban to Pietermaritzburg in the Comrades Marathon.

A year after returning from South Africa, Nick put together an expedition named Blind Ambition to climb Africa's highest mountain. Four members of the expedition reached the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro. The next year, while climbing in New Zealand, Nick had the privilege of telling his hero – Sir Edmund Hillary – of this achievement.

Although these situations are extraordinary to most of us, Nick's down-to-earth nature and compelling descriptions of what he smelt, heard and felt at the time enable the listener to place themselves in his well-travelled shoes.

He connects with people of all backgrounds – in fact visiting rural communities as part of his Australia Day Ambassador duties is a highlight of his year. Importantly, he possesses a talent for making the audience feel comfortable and confident about asking him questions about blindness.

Nick describes himself as a very ordinary person who has managed to follow many of his dreams – among them marrying Heather, who is also blind, and raising two teenagers, Peter and Belinda.

Vision Australia's outstanding Community Development Officer and public speaker is among the 300,000 Australians who are blind or have low vision. This number is expected to double by 600,000, which makes Nick's message all the more relevant to your business or organisation.

To learn more about living with blindness and low vision and what you can do to make your environment more accessible for the thousands of Australians like Nick, call 1300 84 74 66 to arrange a booking.

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