

Media Release

26 January 2025

Bumper celebration for Australia Day in the Red Centre

New citizens, inspiring residents and community spirit were all celebrated in a special Australia Day ceremony in Alice Springs today.

Festivities kicked off with the return of the Australia Day Fun Run, with locals getting into the spirit as they ran, walked and cycled around the iconic Todd River in their best Aussie outfits.

Directly after the Fun Run, Alice Springs welcomed 70 new residents from a diverse range of countries including Bangladesh, Cameroon, Colombia, France, Germany, India, South Korea, Nepal, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Portugal, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, United Kingdom, United States of America and Zambia.

"I often say that welcoming new citizens to our community is one of the most special things you can do as Mayor, and today that's particularly true," Mayor Matt Paterson said.

"Seeing the smile on the faces of our new residents as they are welcomed to their new home, on our national day, fills me with a great deal of pride. I can't imagine there's a more special place for such an occasion than right here in the heart of our country."

Following the Citizenship Ceremony, Mayor Paterson announced the winners of the 2025 Centralian Awards. The 2025 award recipients are:

2025 Centralian Citizenship Awards recipients (bios on following pages):

Centralian Citizen of the Year – Jeanette and Peter Gurrie

Centralian Young Citizen of the Year – Armani Francois

Centralian Senior Citizen of the Year – Jovita Price

Students of the Year – Hercules Jones (Bonya School), Emma Vakapora (Gillen Primary), Joel Connell (OLSH College Sadadeen), Gurasees Kuar (OLSH College Traeger) and Kaylah La (OLSH College Bath St)

"We know that our community is full of tremendous people. The winners of the 2025 Centralian Citizenship awards exemplify what is truly great about our community," Mayor Matt Paterson said.

"They share a common trait of putting the joy of others before themselves and they make our town a better place. I would like to offer a heartfelt congratulations to the 2025 award winners and say thank you for all that you do. I would also like to acknowledge and say thank you to all nominees across all categories."

Alice Springs Town Council extends a special thank you to Girl Guides Alice Springs, Apex Club of Central Australia, Emergency Services of Alice Springs, Brenden Heenan and the Alice Springs Town Band for their support on the day.

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2024 Centralian Awards – Recipients' Biographies

Centralian Citizen of the Year –Jeanette and Peter Gurrie

Jeanette and Peter Gurrie have been dedicated to celebrating Halloween with the Alice Springs community for over 10 years.

Each year they spend weeks decorating their house, building the hype around the celebration and sense of community not only within their neighbourhood, but far beyond their street. There is a different theme every year and the cost of decorations and putting the event on are all covered by Jeanette and Peter. Jeanette dresses up in theme and more than 5,000 children and families come through their front yard. Together with Peter they give out lolly bags handmade, locally purchased and according to the theme of the year.

It is the highlight of all trick or treaters night! For those not wanting sugar highs, they also offer Zooper Doopers, fruit or a packet of chips.

In 2023, Jeanette and Peter gave away 200 lolly bags, 300 bags of chips, 400 Zooper Doopers and bags of fruit. Jeanette thanked the Alice Springs Community for coming together and enjoying the evening together and acknowledged the wonderful costumes she saw come through the yard stating "all you parents are raising wonderful little adults".

The 2024 theme was 'Clowns', and it was the last year the Gurrie's decorated their Alice Springs property for Halloween. Jeanette and Peter established this tradition, and it has been built into the Alice Springs community as a well-known highlight of Halloween for years to come.

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Young Centralian Citizen of the Year – Armani Francois

Armani Francois is an extraordinary young leader whose impact spans across youth advocacy, cultural representation, performing arts, and athletics. An Eastern Arrernte woman of Arrernte, Torres Strait Islander, and Mauritian heritage, Armani's passion for empowering indigenous women and amplifying youth voices has been evident throughout her remarkable journey.

Her contributions to the Northern Territory Youth Committee have been invaluable. She has been a driving force behind the success of youth conferences across the Territory, delivering powerful and confident presentations. Her willingness to share her story in public forums such as the No Woman Left Behind panels, the Meeting of Arts Professionals Forum, and the Youth Conference has inspired countless young people and adults alike.

Armani also regularly provides heartfelt and meaningful Welcome to Countries at prestigious events, including the NT Performing Arts Awards, demonstrating her deep cultural pride and ability to connect audiences to the richness of her heritage.

Her leadership and advocacy extend beyond the Northern Territory, and she appears regularly in media reports. As a representative of youth parliament and a participant in national leadership and sporting forums, Armani has proudly showcased the voices and perspectives of NT youth.

Her starring role in *Beyond the Headlines*, a documentary offering youth perspectives on crime in Alice Springs, is a shining example of her ability to tackle complex societal issues with maturity and insight. In addition to her advocacy work, Armani is a talented performing artist and athlete. Her love for singing and guitar playing has been showcased at various Fringe Festivals across the Northern Territory, where her performances resonate with authenticity and passion.

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Centralian Senior Citizen of the Year – Jovita Price

Jovita Price migrated to Australia from Philippines in 1981 and moved to Alice Springs in 1989. She worked at the Alice Springs Hospital kitchen as a supervisor until her retirement in recent years.

Over the years, Jovita has been supporting in a volunteer capacity many organizations, such as the Migrant Resource Center, Bangtail Muster Parade, Philippine Independence Day celebrations, International Women's Day, Senior's Month and Red Cross Appeal.

Jovita is currently volunteering at Alice Springs Multicultural Community Services, Our Lady of Sacred Heart Church, and Studio B.

Jovita actively participated in an oral history project at Red Cross, shared her stories published in a Book by the late Mr Reg Harris and recently she was featured in Residence Book distributed in hotels around the NT. She also participated in the project New Ages, New Images displayed at the Women's Museum of Australia in Alice Springs.

Jovita has an open house policy to anyone in need, assisting with food, clothing and even her own home when needed.

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Community Event of the Year – 2024 West Macs Monster

The West Macs Monster, created and run entirely by local volunteers, has blossomed into a remarkable celebration of community and resilience. What started as a vision by dedicated locals has grown into a nationally recognized event, drawing participants from all over Australia. From seasoned athletes to first-time runners, everyone involved in the West Macs Monster contributes to a tapestry of shared experiences and lasting memories.

Local volunteers invest countless hours into making this event a success, working behind the scenes to organize logistics, safety measures, and support services for participants.

Beyond the physical challenge, West Macs Monster brings tangible benefits to the local economy. The influx of participants, families, and spectators boosts business for local hotels, restaurants, and other vendors, fostering economic growth that lasts beyond race day.

The event promotes the region as a tourism destination, encouraging further exploration of the West MacDonnell Ranges, which enhances ongoing support for the area's hospitality and the retail sectors. West Macs Monster race has grown to be more than just a sporting event- it's a celebration of community strength, natural beauty, and cultural heritage. It isn't just a race- it is a powerful example of how a volunteer-driven event can uplift and unite an entire community, building genuine and enduring connections that continue to flourish long after the finish line.

ENDS

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