

Centralian Citizens of the Year

A group of inspiring Centralians were recognised for their contributions to the Alice Springs community and new citizens from around the world were welcomed as part of Alice Springs Town Council's Australia Day celebrations on Thursday.

A total of 55 new Australians received citizenship from a diverse range of countries including Nepal, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, Estonia, Germany, Philippines, Zimbabwe, China, Vietnam, France, United Kingdom, India, Norway, Ireland, Brazil, Taiwan, Bangladesh, Sweden, Kenya and New Zealand.

"One of the greatest joys in my role is to confer Citizenship on people from all walks of life and share in this tremendously special occasion with them," Mayor Matt Paterson said.

"Seeing the smile on the faces of our newest citizens is an incredible moment and I welcome everyone to our wonderful community.

Following the citizenship ceremony, the 2023 Centralian Citizenship Award winners were announced.

2023 Centralian Citizenship Awards recipients (bios on following pages):

Centralian Senior Citizen of the Year – John Bermingham

Centralian Event of the Year – Olive Pink Opera

Centralian Young Citizen of the Year – Jordon Humphreys

Centralian Citizen of the Year – Leony Bowey

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“Alice Springs is a town full of extraordinary people that make our community a better place each and every day,” Mayor Matt Paterson said.

“It’s important that we recognise those that go above and beyond for their community and I congratulate everyone that has won an award, along with all those nominated. Thank you for helping make Alice Springs a better place.”

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2023 Centralian Awards – Recipients’ Biographies

Centralian Citizen of the Year – Leony Bowey

Leony (Leonamedes Bowey) has dedicated her past 40 years in making Alice Springs a welcoming and inclusive place for all. Since her arrival to Australia from the Philippines in 1982 – firstly settling with her husband 85km outside of Elliott NT and then in Alawoona SA – Leony came to Alice Springs three years later. Since then, Leony has committed her time to passionately serving the Alice Springs community, often behind the scenes. Leony played a vital role in establishing the Migrant Resource Centre (now the Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia), which is the only organisation in Alice Springs specifically supporting migrants and refugees. In addition to advocating and supporting the establishment of this vital community service, she was also the coordinator for several years, helping to set up new programs and services (such as the popular and still continuing multicultural playgroup, Susu Mama), organising multicultural community events, and providing support to newly-arrived migrants and refugees. She is still a strong advocate and supporter of the organisation, including in her role as a Migration Agent where she provides pro-bono migration advice to clients who can’t afford to pay a migration agent. Leony is constantly working closely with the local Filipino and Alice Springs’ community to help bring people together and assist those in need. This includes taking older people to appointments, cooking food and helping vulnerable people in the community, fundraising for people with financial difficulties (such as unexpected medical and funeral costs), and also welcoming newly arrived Filipino community members and other migrants to Alice Springs to support their settlement and integration in the broader community.

While Leony has been a major advocate and supporter of Alice Springs’ multicultural community, she has also volunteered extensively to support the wider Alice Springs community. Some of the highlights of her extensive community service over the past 40 years include:

- Tutoring students at Yirara
- Long-term Tagalog interpreter and translator for the Office of Multicultural Affairs
- Long-term Mabuhay Multicultural Association member
- Organiser of cultural exchanges between Indigenous and migrant women

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- Contributor to the New Voices, New Relationships exhibition and project for the Women's Museum of Australia
- Participant in domestic violence campaigns, and breast and cervical screening promotions
- Helping to organise a Women's Health conference in Alice Springs
- Women's Cancer Prevention Program consumer advisory group member
- Fundraising for Central Dance Theatre
- Masters Games fundraiser for the Tsunami Red Cross Appeal and MCSCA
- Regional Manager Red Cross Alice Springs
- Active member of the Running and Walking Club
- Bosom Buddies (Breast Cancer) volunteer, supporting men and women with cancer

Some of the key awards that she has received in recognition of her community service include:

- Chief Minister's Women's Achievement Award for outstanding contribution to the Northern Territory – 1998
- Australian Red Cross Certificate for Commendation for Providing Outstanding Leadership
- Support and Assistance to the Australian Red Cross NT – 2007
- Long Services Award by the Interpreting and Translating Service NT (Continuous Language Service Provision) – 2008
- Chief Minister's Medal for outstanding service to the Northern Territory's multicultural community – 2012

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Young Centralian Citizen of the Year – Jordon Humphreys

Jordon is a member of the 2022 NT Youth Round Table, where he advises government on policy relevant to youth. This year, he has been a strong advocate for a strong advocate for disability, mental health and the prevention of bullying, and consulted on the National Disability Framework earlier this year and attended the launch of the NT Disability Strategy.

Jordon was also involved with the consultations for the Northern Territory Education Engagement Strategy in 2021. He played a significant role in developing the Department of Education Youth Voice Peak Group, which is to be established in 2023. He was a member of the Organising Committee for the 2022 NT All Youth Conference, and he hosted the livestream for the conference in order to give remote youth access to the event, which was held in Darwin. He pushed for to have an Alice Springs event for the conference, which is currently being developed for 2023. He also pushed for the NT Youth Round Table to hold the first in-person meeting outside of Darwin, this was held in Alice Springs earlier this year.

Jordon is an active member of Senior Leadership programs at St Philip's College and was elected to the position of Vice-House Captain within his House, McKay. He is responsible for presenting at House Meetings, running events for his peers, mentoring, and coaching McKay students.

Community Event of the Year – The Olive Pink Opera

The Olive Pink Opera, which celebrated the astonishing life of Olive Pink, was performed in Alice Springs 6th, 7th and 8th of October 2022 to critical acclaim. It was an astounding triumph and a sell out two weeks prior to the event. The Opera, with a local cast of vocalists, was performed with a live orchestra of mostly local musicians, the Central Australian Aboriginal Women's Choir, and the Gaps Kids Chorus of twenty-five youth.

The Opera was based on real stories of the interactions between Ms Pink and people of Alice Springs. It was set in the Garden at sunset, with the backdrop of ancient hills glowing red in the evening light, native trees and white gums, evening bird song and dramatic skies.

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It attracted over 950 audience members over three nights, who were moved to standing ovations each night. Audience members were from the United States and New Zealand, all over Australia, the Northern Territory and Alice Springs. NT residents made up 64% (448) of the paying audience with 36% (252) interstate or international cultural tourists.

Community identity and connectedness was strengthened by the opportunity to attend the free preview for Aboriginal community members, family and friends of the cast and crew and guests of the Garden. This attracted over 230 audience members, with 70 Aboriginal guests, who enjoyed a free community afternoon tea prior to the Opera.

The Opera production directly invested approximately \$600,000 into the Alice Springs and NT economy. On top of this, it is estimated the 252 interstate and international audience members spent well over \$250,000 in Alice Springs during the period of the Opera. The production involved over ninety cast and crew, seventy-seven of whom were from Alice Springs. Forty-three volunteers from the Alice Springs community donated their time to support audience management, box office and traffic control. The Opera provided paid employment for over 35 Alice Springs artists and crew and purchased goods and services from approximately 15 Alice Springs businesses.

Centralian Senior Citizen of the Year – John Bermingham

John Bermingham is a permanent, long-term Centralian who is known, respected, and admired by all. John is a tireless contributor to our community in so many ways, including education, sports and community gardening.

John also just happens to be the current World Champion runner and record holder over 1500m and 10,000m and the silver medallist for 5,000m!

John Bermingham is a long-term resident of Alice Springs and moved to town many years ago with his partner Sue. John is an accomplished Senior Mathematics teacher and until his recent retirement was employed at Centralian Senior College.

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Since John's arrival into Central Australia, he has been a stoic, tireless contributor to our local sports scene with a strong focus on running and walking, sharing with community his knowledge and expertise gained from a long association with running and training at an elite level.

John Bermingham has been both the face and back-bone of the Alice Springs Running and Walking Club for at least the past 15 years, including 5 years as Club President and numerous years as Vice- President which gained him Life Membership in 2019. John continues to be an active member of the ASRWC committee with unbroken years of service. There are not too many events where John doesn't involve himself to make sure the credibility of the club remains displaying strong credible leadership and qualified timing results. John has consistently been the voice of the ASRWC over many years with his willingness and readiness to do live radio interviews or public speaking in order to increase the public profile of the Running Club, health and well-being and the benefits of an active community.

John has been the Road and Cross-Country Coordinator for the Alice Springs Masters Games for the past three games and continues to have a strong voice on behalf of all sports coordinators as he lobbies fiercely for a return of the ASMG to the Centre.

John is a fantastic sounding board for all sporting clubs in Alice Springs, bringing new ideas for activities, accepting change while his knowledge on running as well as his love for the sport is unmatched in Alice Springs.

In amongst all this, John keeps himself fit and ready for his own competitive desires participating in a range of running distances and events nationally and internationally.

The Alice Springs Community is only too well aware of John's recent campaign to travel overseas to Tampere, Finland (during Covid-19) and compete as a 70-year old at the World Athletic Masters Championships.

John competed in the 5,000m (silver medal) where a momentary lapse of concentration saw him miss out on the gold medal in the M70. With absolute honesty, integrity and humility John publicly explained the 2nd place as "I felt everything was going to plan with 100 metres to go, when I started daydreaming and conserving energy. Before I knew it, a Dutch runner overtook me on the inside to win".

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Without doubt, the whole of Alice Springs felt John's pain and disappointment, however like the true Centralian he is, with spirit and resilience John continued on with his campaign to take out the Gold Medal and a World Masters Record in both the 1500m and 10,000m events for his M70 age group.

Not only did John bring kudos to Central Australia, with his outstanding results in Tampere, Finland in July, 2022 he received accolades and recognition throughout the Northern Territory, Australia and on the International running scene.

John's determination and success echoed deeply into the Central Australian community reaching, uplifting, and inspiring each and every one of us, whether we are runners, sporty in any way or couch potatoes. Everyone felt the thrill of John's achievement and the enormous uplifting of community spirit to learn of one man's courage and achievements; the positive impact continuing to run deep in our souls.

To conclude, John is a humble high-achiever and his unselfish, untiring efforts, particularly behind the scenes, towards our community continue to grow and flourish positivity in our town and should not go without recognition, whether it be in sport, at the Community Garden or speaking up to support others.

Without doubt, John Bermingham is worthy of Centralian Senior Citizen 2023 and an honour that he would wear proudly given the opportunity.

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