

MEDIA RELEASE

26 January 2020



Australia Day Civic Events – Alice Springs

Alice Springs Town Council's Australia Day events commenced today with a traditional Smoking Ceremony, the Official Flag-raising, a Welcome to Country, followed by the Australia Day Citizenship Ceremony, and concluding with the 2021 Centralian Awards presentation.

Today's Official Party included Mayor Damien Ryan and CEO Robert Jennings, with VIP guests: Mrs Pat Miller AO, Deputy of the Administrator of the NT; The Hon Chansey Paech MLA, Member for Gwoja; The Hon Warren Snowdon MP, Member for Lingiari; Mr Joshua Burgoyne MLA, Member for Braitling; and Mr Bill Yan MLA, Member for Namatjira. MC for the event was Town Crier, Meredith Campbell.

"Today, we welcomed 43 adults and children from the Philippines, France, India, Pakistan, Wales, United Kingdom, Zimbabwe, South Korea, Kenya, Ireland, Thailand and Nepal into our Central Australian family," said Mayor Damien Ryan.

"Each year, we welcome hundreds of new Australians into our growing community. Whether you are here by birth or by choice, Citizenship is the common bond that exists between us. Today is an opportunity for Australians to reflect on our history, the highs, and the lows; to respect the stories of all our people; and, to celebrate the achievements of our nation's citizens."

Following the citizenship ceremony, the 2021 Centralian Citizenship Awards recipients were announced.

2021 Centralian Citizenship Awards recipients (bios on following pages):

- Centralian Volunteer of the Year – **Matthew McKinlay**
- Centralian Senior Citizen of the Year – **Geoff Miers**
- Centralian Event of the Year – **Stress Less in the Park**
- Centralian Young Citizen of the Year – **Declan Miller**
- Centralian Citizen of the Year – **Bruce Simmons**

"Australia Day is also an opportunity to recognise our local heroes. The Centralian Awards recognise remarkable individuals and the outstanding contributions they've made to our community over the past year." said Mayor Damien Ryan.

The January '26rs' were then invited to join the Official Party in singing *Happy Birthday*, with music accompaniment from the Alice Springs Town Band, and a free community sausage sizzle followed the formal proceedings.

Concurrently, Alice Springs Aquatic & Leisure Centre hosted the Australia Day Pool Party with free entry from 11am–4pm and featuring the giant inflatable, waterslides, music, games, BBQ sausage sizzle, and splash pad fun for the under 5s.

2021 Centralian Awards – biographies of recipients

Centralian Volunteer of the Year – Matthew McKinlay

Matthew McKinlay is a Foster Carer, and a Volunteer for Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA), holding the position of Chair of the Alice Springs Board for the previous two years, as well as working for Alice Springs Police as the Southern Youth Diversion Officer.

Matthew is a member of the NT Veterans Affairs Ministerial Advisory Committee, representing the interests of Central Australian Veterans. In 2020, he successfully obtained grant funding from Veterans Affairs to establish a Veterans & Families Equine Therapy program in Alice Springs. This program is newly underway and promises to be of great benefit to members of our local community.

Through Matthew's volunteer work and as spokesperson for the RDA, he has shared the program's benefits with the wider community by self-producing promotional videos. His advocacy has helped raised the profile of the organisation, increasing awareness that its programs not only involve horse riding for both disabled and able-bodied riders, but also of RDA's hospital visits, participation in community events, the Old Timers morning tea program, VET course delivery, provision of youth diversion programs, lead-line program, and the Veterans & Families Equine Therapy program.

As Chair of the RDA Board, Matthew has been integral in guiding the organisation's long-term direction, ensuring the continued delivery of services to local riders and their families who utilise its services.

As 2021 Centralian Volunteer of the Year, Matthew is being recognised for going above and beyond his already very busy life to assist, in every aspect, those in our community who need it most.

Centralian Senior Citizen of the Year – Geoff Miers

Geoff Miers has never wavered in his commitment to our town and its people. Many people will know Geoff, who has lived in Alice Springs since the 1970s and continually demonstrates a community-minded spirit in every of his many diverse public roles.

Geoff had an active role in the RSCPA (when it was operating) and has been President of the East Side Residents Group, as well as a member, which was very active during the 80s and 90s, ensuring the development of parks in Gosse Street and Lindsay Avenue. He also served on the 7th and 8th Alice Springs Town Councils as an Alderman (1992 – 2000), and as Deputy Mayor (1996).

For several years, Geoff has encouraged participation in the annual Alice Springs Show horticultural competition, in which he was also a member of the judging panel. He is recognised as a great source of knowledge, particularly of arid-zone gardening, and is highly respected in national horticultural circles.

Geoff's advice is keenly sought by both professional and amateur gardeners across Central Australia. He freely shares his wealth of knowledge with the community via gardening shows, newspaper and online articles, books, and on social media.

Geoff supports annual National Tree Day, planting the Lindsay Avenue roundabout – a joy to locals and tourists alike with its resplendent Sturt Desert Peas – as well as establishing the beautiful native garden at Rona Glen Preschool.

Though these are just a few of Geoff's many achievements, his knowledge and contributions in continuing the legacy of Frank McAllister in greening and beautifying Alice Springs ensure he is a worthy recipient of 2021 Centralian Senior Citizen of the Year Award.

Centralian Event of the Year – Stress Less in the Park, 9 October 2020

Stress Less in the Park is a feature event of local Mental Health Week activities, providing a community focus on mental health and wellbeing. The event aims to break down stigma around mental health conditions, and raise awareness of local service providers by providing educational information to the community.

Now in its seventh year, Stress Less in the Park is coordinated by the Mental Health Association of Central Australia, with the support of a local committee, including representatives from the National Disability Insurance Agency, Mental Illness Fellowship NT, Central Australia Health Service, Anglicare and Salvation Army. The event receives funding from the Northern Territory Primary Health Network with in-kind support from Alice Springs Town Council.

In 2020, the event relocated from the Hospital Lawns to the Civic Centre Lawns for increased visibility and ease of access. The theme, 'Building Mentally Healthy Communities', focused on collaboration as a key principle for the event. Over 350 people attended, including mental health consumers, people with disabilities, families and visitors to Alice Springs.

The event program included a Welcome to Country by Kumalie Riley, welcoming address by Robyn Lambley MLA, music by Jessie K, Cain Gilmour and MHACA participant group Kututu Wattle Seeds, children's entertainer Michael Ahmazing, and 19 local service provider information stalls. A comprehensive COVID Safety Plan was in place which included fencing, entry and exit points, contact tracing registration, increased cleaning of facilities, and sanitising stations.

Feedback from the day was overwhelmingly positive with survey data indicating 99% of survey participants were very satisfied or satisfied with the event, 53% of respondents stating a 'definitely better' understanding of how to seek help for mental health challenges, with 38% stating a 'somewhat better' understanding.

Service providers also provided positive feedback, including:

- *"This was a very valuable opportunity to connect with stakeholders and community members".*
- *"We had meaningful engagement and networking".*
- *"The event was managed extremely well, had a great blend of entertainment making it interesting while attendees were sourcing information."*
- *"Stress Less in the Park was a great way to engage with the community about mental health and have discussions with people who were wandering around on the day".*
- *"I had a great conversation with a mum about her children [whom] she wanted to get help and support for."*

2020 has been a tough year, and with psychological distress being prevalent in our community, it is important for people to understand what support services are available to them. Positive messaging that encourages seeking help for mental health challenges and reduces stigma around mental ill health is essential, as is ease of access to services that are locally available.

Stress Less in the Park continues to provide a unique and holistic local focus on mental health, where the social determinants of wellbeing are acknowledged and understood, and where organisations can work together to provide the best outcomes for the community.

Succeeding in what has been a most difficult year, this event is well-deserving of the 2021 Centralian Event of the Year Award.

Centralian Young Citizen of the Year – Declan Miller

Declan Miller was nominated for outstanding service to his school – Centralian Senior College – and the wider community over the past few years. He is a leader amongst his peers with a cheerful, respectful, caring manner and a most positive, determined attitude.

Declan was a Year 12 student leader at Centralian Senior College and a member of the Clontarf Academy and the Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation's *Follow Your Dream* programs. He is a lifelong learner, always keen to further develop knowledge and skills, and has just graduated Year 12 with his Northern Territory Certificate of Education & Training.

In mid-2020, Declan completed the 18-month NT Police, Fire & Emergency Services Cadet program, as a member of Squad 7, comprising the VET Certificate II in Community Engagement, and Certificate III in Business. Upon graduating, Declan was presented with the *Award for Outstanding Displays of Community Engagement* – for consistent engagement, with people both within the organisation and the wider community.

For the past four years, Declan has participated in a Graphic Novel project and his completed work, *'Mixed Feelings'*, is being published this year by the Indigenous Literacy Foundation and Gestalt Publishing. Throughout this enterprise, Declan shared his knowledge and skills with other students, taking a presenter's role in several graphic novel workshops, including at the 2019 NT Writer's Festival in Alice Springs. In the Governor-General's 2020 visit to Centralian Senior College, Declan showcased his graphic novel project work and discussed successfully completing Year 12, and the NTPFES Cadet program, during a most difficult year.

Declan also developed his 'Comics in Crisis!' website with YouTube tutorials to guide others in making their own comics during the coronavirus pandemic – an 'extraordinary' and creative response to the global health crisis.

Declan's achievements also include the publishing of his graphic short stories in the 2020 *Borderlands* anthology, undertaking a Creative Careers traineeship with Stick Mob, Desert Knowledge Australia and Charles Darwin University, which included managing a podcast project in partnership with ABC Heywire, 8CCC and his school peers – all whilst completing Year 12 English, Mathematics, plus working at Bunnings and the Alice Springs Aquatic & Leisure Centre.

Declan was MC for Centralian Senior College's annual Twilight Arts Festival, and Food & Hospitality classes, participating in the school's My Kitchen Rules video activities. In 2019, he was awarded the Mister Shaun Student Community Service Award for outstanding community service. During the current coronavirus pandemic, Declan played an important role for Congress Media's video production as the character 'Dr Gammon', communicating good hygiene practices.

Additionally, Declan has been nominated for the ADF's *Long Tan Youth Leadership & Teamwork Award* for community service, leadership and teamwork.

With his well-rounded community attitude and commitment to sharing knowledge, Declan is a worthy recipient of the 2021 Young Centralian Citizen of the Year Award, and we wish him well in establishing his future graphics business.

Centralian Citizen of the Year – Bruce Simmons

Bruce Simmons is a hard-working community-minded retiree who has been the Convenor of the Alice Springs Community Garden since 2011 – visiting the Old East Side site almost daily – and is a stalwart of the garden's success. Bruce is well-respected and loved by those in the garden's community for his willingness to help others tend their plot or offer some sage gardening advice. At each Sunday Working Bee he attends, Bruce always finds something he can do to encourage the garden to grow.

When he is not working outside, Bruce is also involved in the governance of the Community Garden, chairing meetings, checking minutes are accurate and compliant, and engaging with members over social media. He and his family have their own extensive garden – its produce donated to the 'Food for Alice' market stall, with profits returned to the Community Garden.

Bruce was also integral in establishing the local Red Cross garden, as a foundation member in Gillen's new Westside Community Garden and, as Chief Compost Turner during a recent Working Bee project to recycle removed Buffel Grass by mixing it with manure for the Community Garden.

As someone who leads by example and is never afraid of hard work, Bruce is an inspiring community leader who works alongside people of all ages to kindle an interest and love of gardening, simply by giving his time in the garden. He is a truly altruistic person, his heart always focused on what is good for the community.

Bruce is typically a shy person who doesn't expect everyone to work as hard or for long as he does but, through his leadership, he inspires people into action ensuring the Community Garden is a place of inspiration and community cohesion. He is a true leader.

Bruce Simmon's decades of service and commitment to the wellbeing of our community, driven by a true sense of purpose in nurturing the Alice Springs Community Garden to become a beacon of sustainability and resilience, have ensured he is a most worthy recipient of the 2021 Centralian of the Year Award.

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