

Media Release

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Terrigal resident gives back to the community

Terrigal resident Rhonda Bignell has been performing regular charity and community work since the age of 13.

In her spare time, Rhonda can be found playing the piano or piano accordion in nursing homes, retirement villages and senior citizen centres on the Central Coast.

'I don't care if the group I perform for is big or small, I just hope everyone enjoys themselves,' Rhonda said.

'It's a long way to Tipperary' and *'Along the road to Gundagai'* are just some of the songs that feature on Rhonda's play list.

Her strong commitment to charity and community work came from her parents who told her that 'giving back to the community is important.'

Terrigal Senior Citizens president, Harry Stephenson OAM believes 'Rhonda is absolutely wonderful. She volunteers her time to participate in our music concerts, and also partakes in our Seniors Week program.'

As CEO of Family Day Care Australia, the national peak body for home-based child care, Rhonda has a very busy schedule but she always seem to effectively juggle her work duties to ensure she has time for her charity commitments.

'During a break Rhonda is often seen loading her piano accordion in the boot of her car and heading off to a gig,' said Sarah-Lucy Rice, a work colleague of Rhonda's from Family Day Care Australia.

Professionally, Rhonda has led a number of large-well known organisations including St John Ambulance (NSW), where she led 170 staff and 4000 volunteers. As CEO of Family Day Care Australia, she is responsible for promoting family day care as a high quality education and care service for Australian families and outcomes for children are at the centre of government decision making a policy debate.

Rhonda's charity and community work is not just restricted to the Central Coast she has performed all over NSW and sometimes interstate when on holiday.

'I did quite a few performances in Perth whilst visiting family, but I didn't take the piano accordion on the plane because I didn't think it would remain in one piece,' laughed Rhonda. 'I just played the piano when an opportunity arose.'

Rhonda has also performed in palliative care hospitals, respite centres and aged health services.

On the Central Coast, volunteers like Rhonda are in demand.

'We always need volunteers to help with our activities and in the kitchen,' Harry from the Terrigal Senior Citizens said.

Indoor lawn bowls, computer classes, yoga, musical concerts and fitness classes are just some of the activities the Terrigal Senior Citizens offer.

'We accept members from 50 years upwards, but we have made exceptions on a couple of occasions,' Harry explained.

'When I became president seven years ago I introduced the motto – there are no strangers here, only friends you are yet to meet,' he added.

The annual membership fee for Terrigal Senior Citizen is five dollars and there is also a small fee attached to activities that members wish to participate in. Registration is open all year round.

Val Stephenson, Harry's wife, hates to think that there are seniors out there who are alone at home not having fun and meeting people.

'We are a very friendly bunch – Harry and I spend most of our time down at the Terrigal Senior Citizens enjoying the company of other members.'

Like Rhonda, Harry and Val have both been busy performing community work for many years.

'In 1999 I received the Premier's Award [for outstanding community work]. Val and I have been doing volunteer work since 1962,' Harry said.

In 2008 Harry also received the Medal of the Order of Australia for his services to the Central Coast community through a range of organisations.

'One of the ladies here [Terrigal Senior Citizens] nominated me for the Medal of the Order of Australia, which was a great surprise. I didn't have a clue and I was absolutely shocked that Val kept the secret for two years. There should have been two names on the award because everything I do I get 110 percent support from Val,' Harry explained.

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