


Latrobe City Australia Day 2026 Civic Function

Cr Sharon Gibson
Mayor, Latrobe City Council

Julie Strini
Master of Ceremonies





**Latrobe City Council acknowledges
that it operates on the traditional land
of the Brayakaulung people of the
Gunaikurnai nation and pays respect
to their Elders past and present.**

Australia Day Civic Function

Latrobe City Council warmly welcomes our newest official Australian Citizens in today's Citizenship Ceremony and congratulates the community members nominated in the Australia Day Awards program.

All nominees for the Australia Day Awards have all selflessly sought to make our region a great place to work, live and visit.

To those nominated in the Australia Day Awards, we thank you for the significant impact you have had in our community. To our newest Australian citizens, we celebrate and thank you for calling Latrobe City home.

Order of events

Welcome

Acknowledgement of Country

Citizenship Ceremony

Australia Day Mayor Address

Presentation of Australia Day 2026 Awards

Refreshments



Mayor's Message

As we celebrate all that we love about our country – this Australia Day I am reflecting particularly on our culture of solidarity. Our region is experiencing a time of diversification, and as we know, there are some tough times ahead as our traditional industries shut down. It's time to work as one.

We know that one of many things our community excels at is coming together. When needed, we show up for our family, our friends, our neighbours and often people we've never even met. Latrobe is resilient – we've faced tough times before and we'll do it again.

Australia is built on mateship, and we all have times where we need a helping hand. I encourage you to pay it forward and support others where you can. Pass on the community spirit through acts of kindness and volunteering your time. Whether it's for your sporting club, a local charity or your child's school, every moment of giving back supports our community.

Today we celebrate just that in recognising the heartfelt contributions of our community members. Latrobe is stronger because of you and for that we are endlessly grateful.

I am truly in awe by the array of generous acts we are recognising today. We've seen organisations creating opportunities for connection, Elvis himself – okay, maybe an impersonator – supporting women affected by breast cancer, blankets knitted for community members needing warmth, and even an incredible 380-kilometre run across the Simpson Desert to raise vital funds for mental health supports.

It warms my heart to know these selfless Latrobe City residents are making a massive difference to help those in their community. They are the heart and soul of our community and that's what I want Latrobe to be known for.

On behalf of my fellow Councillors and everyone at Latrobe City, I am delighted to congratulate today's nominees – you're all winners to me. We wish you a happy Australia Day and look forward to the year ahead as we move forward together.

Cr Sharon Gibson
Mayor of Latrobe City Council

CITIZENSHIP

Latrobe City Council warmly welcomes all new Australian citizens who have chosen to make Latrobe City their home.

On Australia Day, we come together as a nation to celebrate what is great about living in this country and what we love about being Australian.

Australian citizenship ceremonies are an important part of Australia Day celebrations, and this ceremony is one of many being held around the country today.

Today marks a special and important step in the lives of each new citizen, and for those sharing this occasion. By the end of today's ceremony, we will have welcomed over 50 new citizens to our Australian family, from 21 countries around the world.

Council congratulates all new citizens for the commitment they have made to being part of Australia's future.

Advance Australia Fair

Australians all let us rejoice

For we are one and free

With golden soil and wealth for toil

Our home is girt by sea

Our land abounds in nature's gifts

Of beauty rich and rare

In history's page let every stage

Advance Australia Fair

In joyful strains then let us sing

Advance Australia Fair

Beneath our radiant Southern Cross

We'll toil with hearts and hands

To make this Commonwealth of ours

Renowned of all the lands

For those who've come across the seas

We've boundless plains to share

With courage let us all combine

To Advance Australia Fair

In joyful strains then let us sing

Advance Australia Fair

The Affirmation

As an Australian citizen,
I affirm my loyalty to Australia and
its people,

Whose democratic beliefs I share,
Whose rights and liberties I respect,
And whose laws I uphold and obey.

Australia Day Awards 2026

NOMINEES

Community Service of the year

- Jakey Sting Rae - Jakey's Mental Walk & Talks for Mental Health
- Ken Thompson
- Willow House Community Support (Paid Forward Program)

Community Event of the year

- Association of Filipino - Australians in Gippsland Inc. (SPAG) Filipino Fiesta Event
- International Women's Group Inc - Harmony Day
- Knitted Knockers Australia Traralgon Branch - An Afternoon with Elvis & Friends
- Latrobe Emergency & Community Services Expo
- Traralgon Community Christmas Parade, Market and Grottos

Young Citizen of the year

- Emily Sutton

Senior Citizen of the year

- Annette Deppler
- Mercy Heily
- Rose Horvat
- Patricia Meers
- Kate Rock
- Jeffery Sawyer
- Jennifer Tulau

Citizen of the year

- Blake Bourne
- Amber Ericksen
- Jackie McLure
- Margie Norder
- Linda Pink
- Robert Sharrock
- Kevin Taylor
- Diane Wilkinson



**2026 Award Nominee –
Community Service of the year**

**Jakey Sting Rae –
Jakey's Mental Walk &
Talks for Mental Health**

Every day in August, Jakey walked an average of 35 kilometres per day to raise money for a mental health charity. He raised over \$5,500 from donations and sponsors and gave it all to Bettermentall Australia - a mental health charity that offers peer support, mentoring and resources.

He also organised stalls at his event launch, which helped some of the small businesses who sponsored him get some recognition. Jake also displayed logos of different sponsors on his shirt each day during his walks and gave them a shout out on social media as a thank you.

Jakey managed to walk over 1,000 kilometres over the course of August, with a different friend walking with him each day, giving them the option to open-up and talk about their struggles if they wanted to. Jakey is a great friend and would help anyone in need and is highly liked in the community.

His 1,000 kilometre walk is a massive achievement, showing a lot of dedication, resilience and forward planning, whilst he overcame multiple challenges throughout the month.



**2026 Award Nominee –
Community Service of the year**

Ken Thompson

Ken Thompson has been a dedicated and driving force to bring into existence and to keep operational the not-for-profit community radio station, Gippsland FM 104.7. Community radio was just being born when Ken and a group of community minded people started the radio station into being, initially operating from a shed, which Ken built in 1977.

In 2026, Ken will have been directly involved with Gippsland FM 104.7 for 50 years. Since those days Ken continues to: train presenters, successfully apply for funding for a variety of ethnic, community, operational, programs and equipment including \$100,000 for a transmission tower, prepare submissions to government bodies, mentor new presenters, and present weekly programs.

During this time, he has held many positions including Chairman of the Board of Directors, Secretary and Treasurer. He has trained many volunteers, in studio operation and the legalities of community broadcasting. He has written policies, mentored young broadcasters and recruited new volunteers.

Ken's ongoing commitment to community broadcasting extends beyond Gippsland FM. He has also served the Community Broadcasting Foundation for 10 years and acted as Treasurer for the Community Broadcasting Association of Victoria.



2026 Award Nominee – Community Service of the year

Willow House Community Support (Paid Forward Program)

Willow House Community Support Ltd is a grassroots volunteer-run organisation based in Newborough, Victoria, dedicated to supporting individuals and families facing hardship.

Through its community hub, Willow House provides free emergency food relief, clothing, hygiene products, children's items, and essential care packs for people experiencing homelessness, family violence, or financial distress.

The organisation plays a vital role in Latrobe City, delivering practical, person-centred assistance with compassion and respect. It also partners with local services and regularly hosts inclusive community events that promote connection, dignity, and wellbeing. Willow House has become a safe and welcoming space for people from all walks of life, including those experiencing isolation, trauma, or crisis.

Willow House is responsive to emerging needs, providing support during emergencies such as local power outages and natural disasters. Operated entirely by passionate volunteers, the organisation assists hundreds of families every month and continues to grow its impact through strong community ties and a commitment to making a difference.

The leadership team at Willow House consistently advocates for vulnerable members of Latrobe City. Their efforts include emergency response during floods and power outages and organising seasonal drives such as winter warmth packs and Christmas hampers.



2026 Award Nominee – Community Event of the year

Association of Filipino - Australians in Gippsland Inc. (SPAG) Filipino Fiesta Event

The Association of Filipino - Australians in Gippsland Inc. has been hosting Filipino Fiesta event on the second Sunday of November annually in Latrobe City since 2000. The event is held at the Morwell Immigration Park or Kernot Hall depending on the weather. The festival attracts hundreds of visitors from Warrnambool to Lakes Entrance.

Mid-day religious services open the festival followed by Ati-Atihan Indigenous Street Dance in their colourful cultural costumes. The dancing is performed by the community around the park and Mid Valley Shopping Centre as requested by the management. The Filipino Fiesta event is known for its vibrant culture, eclectic music, and graceful dances. It's a Festival of unity, gratefulness, and togetherness.

The fiesta welcomes everyone and typically involves several other activities. These include beauty pageant, cultural dances, musical performances, food fairs and various competitions and games to entertain the crowd.

For community engagement, the Filipino Fiesta contributed a tremendous role to keep multicultural heritage alive and provides a wealth of multiculturalism to be enjoyed by the Latrobe City community.



2026 Award Nominee - Community Event of the year

International Women's Group Inc - Harmony Day

In March 2025, IWG, a volunteer-run organisation, facilitated their annual Harmony Day event which provided a safe forum for people of diverse cultural and social backgrounds to connect with their local community over a two-course meal, entertainment, activities, and speeches from esteemed community leaders.

The celebration was introduced with a traditional dance performed by a local African dance group, highlighting and platforming their rich and thriving culture.

The event was enriched with numerous musical and dance performances from people of all ages, cultural backgrounds and sexual orientations in the spirit of Diversity Week.

The day was attended by over 90 people, who enjoyed an excellent day of empowering speeches from the Deputy Mayor and Gippsland Multicultural Services, entertainment provided by Ken Shing and local multicultural dancing groups, a fashion parade and Henna station.

IWG is a not-for-profit women-founded organisation established in 1996 run by volunteers of the community, whose projects such as their Harmony Day 2025 Celebration promote their core values of inclusivity and connecting with others.

This vibrant annual event creates opportunities for people of all ages to voluntarily step into roles of leadership and teamwork, which helps to uplift and bring value to Latrobe City and wider community.



2026 Award Nominee - Community Event of the year

Knitted Knockers Australia Traralgon Branch - An Afternoon with Elvis & Friends

Knitted Knockers Australia, Traralgon Branch has hosted this awareness event for three years in a row and each year it attracts 200 people. It's a fun day entertained by the talented Mark Andrew, every year he has the crowd in fits of laughter, dancing and singing along, with his special guests, Dean Martin, Tom Jones, Austin Powers and of course Elvis.

The last two years Jerry Lewis has joined the event and had the crowd crying with laughter. Trent McCurdy is the MC for the day. Each year has been a sell-out event. People travel from Melbourne to attend. It's fantastic to see everyone in the room listen when Jann - Branch Leader/ President shares her story and explains how this Branch came about.

This event is to raise much needed awareness of what Knitted Knockers Traralgon Branch can do for women within the community that have had a partial or a full mastectomy from Breast Cancer.



2026 Award Nominee – Community Event of the year

Latrobe Emergency & Community Services Expo

The Latrobe Emergency and Community Services Expo 2024, held on Sunday 27 October at the Latrobe Regional Airport, was a landmark event that truly united the community. Delivered as a free event and coordinated through the collaboration of multiple emergency services and community agencies, the Expo showcased the power of partnership and the shared commitment to building a safer, stronger Latrobe City.

The Expo went beyond displays and demonstrations. It provided families with a unique opportunity to engage directly with emergency service personnel, explore equipment, and gain practical knowledge in a welcoming, hands-on environment. Local support services also played a vital role, highlighting the assistance available before, during, and after emergencies, ensuring the community left more informed, supported, and connected.

Importantly, the event removed barriers to participation by being free of charge, making it accessible to all families. It also supported the local economy by providing opportunities for food vendors and children's entertainment businesses, while promoting the Latrobe Regional Airport as a vital regional asset.

The true success of the Expo lies in the strong relationships and trust it fostered between agencies and the community, leaving a legacy of resilience, support, and pride across Latrobe City.



2026 Award Nominee – Community Event of the year



Traralgon Community Christmas Parade, Market and Grottos

The Parade Market and Grottos event combines the spectacle of the Parade, the fun of the Grottos and the festive stalls of the Market to celebrate the joys of Christmas. It's a fantastic family event that attracts large crowds every year. The pleasure that it brings the local community is clear from the feedback on Facebook pages and from personal feedback received by all the committee members who work throughout the year to bring the event together.

It's an event that inspires the community and the businesses who contribute time, effort, funding and advertising towards the delivery of the event, all of which makes it free to those who attend.

Over 60 stalls occupy the market. More than 30 parade floats are entered into the parade, typically from community groups such as the Scouts. The two grottos are a great showcase for Santa and the work of the Latrobe Theatre Players.

This is a truly community inspired event with members of the major community groups, Apex, Lions, Traralgon Community Development Association, Royal Exchange Cork Club, and the two Rotary Clubs, Traralgon and Traralgon Central making up the Committee, assisted by Latrobe City Council and Traralgon Centre Plaza.



**2026 Award Nominee –
Young Citizen of the year**

Emily Sutton

Emily has been part of the GippSport team for two years, beginning her journey as a trainee while studying her Certificate IV in Sport Development. She excelled throughout her traineeship, achieving outstanding results in assignments and applying her learning directly in the workplace.

Her conscientious and hard-working nature has seen her develop strong skills in time management, organisation, and prioritisation, enabling her to take on increasing responsibility with confidence. Emily has shown remarkable personal growth, becoming a confident and capable young leader within the organisation and the community.

She is a member of the Changing Gippsland's Game network, contributing to the promotion of gender equality in sport and recreation. She has delivered programs to schools and communities across Gippsland, with a focus on supporting those in need. Emily has built strong relationships with local community organisations, working collaboratively to identify communities that face barriers to participation and helping create inclusive opportunities.

Emily is a coach for Morwell East Under 13s netball team and plays netball, further demonstrating her commitment to supporting and inspiring young people.

Emily is an inspiring young person who embodies commitment, growth, and community spirit, making a valuable contribution to Latrobe City and the wider Gippsland region.



**2026 Award Nominee –
Senior Citizen of the year**

Annette Deppler

Annette has volunteered with Lifeline Gippsland for 35 years as one of the Store and Sorting Supervisors at the Churchill Lifeline Op-Shop. Annette is committed to her volunteering and the running of the op-shop. Annette's support of the Lifeline Gippsland Op-Shop in Churchill extends to all activities to ensure the success and viability of the store.

Annette has led the recruitment and induction of volunteers and participated in community events in addition to her set volunteer hours, all for the purpose of supporting and promoting Lifeline Gippsland's participation in the national 13 11 14 crisis line.

All funds from the store support Lifeline Gippsland's role with the crisis line and delivery of suicide prevention and awareness activities across the region. Annette has volunteered 27,000 hours supporting the Churchill Lifeline Op-Shop.

When discussing volunteering with Annette, she will always slip into conversation her admiration for the Crisis Support Volunteers and the support they provide to ensure no-one has to experience their darkest moment alone.

Without Annette's own volunteering, we would not have the financial capability to recruit and support our crisis supporter volunteers.



**2026 Award Nominee –
Senior Citizen of the year**

Mercy Heily

Mercy Heily came to Latrobe City from the Philippines in 1984. With her warm, outgoing attitude and high energy, Mercy willingly volunteered at her children's schools and sports clubs while working and raising her family. Mercy still volunteers actively at Stockdale Primary School, Traralgon, as a keen sports and education support for her grandchildren.

Mercy applies her world travel experience, community networking knowledge, and nursing training to advocate and improve social connection, mental and physical health and wellbeing for all seniors, while upholding Filipino culture. She teaches healthy cultural cookery in primary schools, demonstrates foods for LCHS's Food For All group, applies her catering skills and cooks for large community events.

Mercy runs a Seniors Gentle Exercise group, to encourage physical activity. Mercy is also an active Gippsland Multicultural Services member.

A long-time member of the Alay Kapwa ("We Care") group, Mercy has worked hard to fund-raise, to support Filipino disadvantaged children. As a founding member of the expanding Latrobe City Multicultural Dance Group, Mercy and the team perform spectacular traditional dances in nursing homes, at group and official Council events. Leading by example, Mercy truly is "the wind beneath our community's wings."



**2026 Award Nominee –
Senior Citizen of the year**

Rose Horvat

Rose settled in Latrobe City in 1991 and began contributing to the community then. At that time, she was employed by Gippsland Multicultural Services (GMS), Morwell, for a short while. During this time, she met many multicultural community members and helped in refugees' settlement. She helped translate for refugees who are not proficient in English. She helped others even at 3am, when people's sick children had to go to hospital. She has helped with translations for police and in court.

After she left GMS she continued with this work as a volunteer because people kept calling her for help. Hence, she continues to contribute to multicultural communities as a volunteer to the present day. She does home visits to check on people, helps with their shopping, and provides moral support when visiting doctors, lawyers, etc, especially the elderly. Over the years, she has contributed to many organisations and community in many ways, doing different things at different times, too numerous to document.

She is a great cook and shares her dishes. She is a member of the International Women's Group (IWG) and her invaluable voluntary contribution is greatly appreciated by this group and others.



**2026 Award Nominee –
Senior Citizen of the year**

Patricia Meers

Pat has been part of the Traralgon Lions Club for the past 11 years. During this time Pat has taken on many different roles within the club. Pat takes a lead role of organising the Traralgon Senior Citizens Christmas function each year, an event that brings together senior citizens and entertains them for two and a half hours on the first Sunday in December.

Pat also organises a knitting club which knits blankets which are delivered to people of need in the local area, and helps a lot with the BBQ's and other activities at the monthly Traralgon Farmer's market in Traralgon.

Pat is well known for her volunteering with the Traralgon Lions - quietly and efficiently doing Lions work to better our community while not seeking any attention for these works.

In the time Pat has been part of the Traralgon Lions Club, she has been presented with many highly respected awards for her outstanding work in the community.

Apart from her Lions Club activities, Pat also volunteers at the red cross opportunity shop each week, does Vinnies soup kitchen and has previously volunteered at palliative care around Latrobe City.



**2026 Award Nominee –
Senior Citizen of the year**

Kate Rock

In around 1987, Kate started volunteering at the Moe Football Netball Club, running the canteen. She was given a life membership to recognise her many years of dedication. Kate had been involved with Querencia Nursing Home volunteering her time with cooking and being there for the residents.

She has helped with providing soup at the Soup kitchen and has given her time for Meals on Wheels for over 29 years, not only giving out meals, but also staying with people to have a chat when they were lonely and sometimes Kate was the only person they would see each day.

During COVID she made masks and aprons to hand out to family, friends and people in need and did not ask for any money.

She volunteers at the RSL for catering events such as wakes and RSL events, she also volunteers at the bowling club looking after one of their indoor competitions. She does all this whilst she is battling her own health problems. Kate would be a worthy recipient of the Senior Citizen of the Year award, to recognise all the years she has volunteered at all different places.



**2026 Award Nominee –
Senior Citizen of the year**

Jeffery Sawyer

Jeffery is a dedicated and community-focused professional with over 50 years of experience across the energy, transport, youth services, and waste management sectors. Jeff is a proven leader with a long-standing record of volunteer service and organisational success, particularly with the Morwell Bowling Club.

Jeff has served 30 years as a member of the Morwell Masonic Lodge and currently holds the position of Worshipful Master of this Lodge.

Jeff has recently concluded more than five years as a volunteer at the Gippsland Sports Academy Board of Management and spent four years with Volunteer Emergency Reserves which is now the State Emergency Service. He is also currently a volunteer at Power Works in Morwell.

He has been Chair of the Morwell Bowling Club since 2000, including supporting staff and members following the devastating fire in 2025. Jeff was awarded the Club Person of the Year at the 2025 Community Clubs Victoria Gala Dinner and Awards Night, held in July 2025.

He has overseen major community events and programs, ensuring growth of the organisation and engagement of many members and guests. Jeff is known for his professional, approachable leadership style, strong mediation skills and financial management.



**2026 Award Nominee –
Senior Citizen of the year**

Jennifer Tulau

Jenny is a committee member of the Traralgon Table Tennis Association. She runs the three pennant tournaments each year and organises and runs the veterans tournament. She is the first to put up her hand to help with any duties to assist in the smooth running of events held during the year.

Jenny is Treasurer on the committee of a weekly community group held at Gippsland Regional Sports Stadium (GRISS). The group consists of up to 70 women who simultaneously participate in soft tennis or chair yoga or a walk around the neighbourhood.

Jenny epitomises the quiet achiever as she sets up the tea and coffee facilities, warmly welcomes everyone, collects money and records payments.

Jenny also sews costumes for the showtime events for the Scouts. Prior to this, she was heavily involved with the Girl Guides doing a similar role.

Jenny regularly assists in opening and closing the table tennis building on Monday night's competition, making numerous phone calls to organise substitute players ensuring the night runs smoothly. Jenny is so friendly and happy to chat with everyone.



2026 Award Nominee –
Citizen of the year

Blake Bourne

Blake Bourne has made an extraordinary contribution to the Gippsland community through his advocacy for mental health and his commitment to creating inclusive spaces. In 2025, Blake became the youngest person to run 380 kilometres across the Simpson Desert, raising over \$30,000 for Speak and Share. His efforts funded workshops for more than 1,500 students, helping to open dialogue around mental wellbeing. Locally, Blake leads the Traralgon Run Club, a free weekly initiative that brings people together to support one another.

He also hosts free community events such as Sip and Dip and The Uncomfortable Challenge, which encouraged over 40 individuals and businesses to step outside their comfort zones and engage in meaningful conversations. Blake's story, rooted in personal recovery, has inspired thousands and continues to break down stigma around mental health.

He regularly speaks at events and shares his story online, using his platform to encourage vulnerability and connection. Blake's work with Speak and Share reflects his long-term dedication to youth mental health. While still early in his journey, Blake's leadership has earned widespread respect.

His impact is felt not only through the funds he's raised, but through the culture of care and courage he's cultivated across Latrobe City.



2026 Award Nominee –
Citizen of the year

Amber Ericksen

Amber Ericksen has dedicated her life to advancing disability rights, inclusion, and stronger community connections in Gippsland. As founder of Clarity Services and Support and Latrobe Support Coordination, she has championed funding for people with disability and created innovative programs that turn inclusion into action.

Through her Thrive Program, Amber has designed industry tasters, job skill development, and micro-enterprise mentoring that provide participants with practical pathways to study, volunteering, and employment. Recognising the deep impact of food insecurity, she has extended Thrive into meal production and distribution, ensuring both skills training and community nourishment are achieved.

Amber's social enterprises have served as living models of inclusion. The Old Gippsstown Tea Room employed and trained people with disability while providing a welcoming community hub. The café was awarded the People's Choice Award in the Good Access is Good Business category, acknowledging her commitment to making access and inclusion part of everyday business.

She has been a strong advocate for equity, working alongside carers, families, and businesses to challenge outdated attitudes, break down barriers, and build sustainable, inclusive opportunities. Amber's contributions embody her vision of a community where every person has the chance to belong, contribute, and thrive.



**2026 Award Nominee –
Citizen of the year**

Jackie McLure

Jackie has volunteered for Lifeline Gippsland for 33 years at the Lifeline Churchill Op Shop. For most of her time Jackie has been the Store and Sorting Supervisor and declined offers of payment for her time and contributions. Jackie is a passionate volunteer and community member. She has led integrated partnerships, linking the op-shop and Lifeline Gippsland with the Churchill Neighbourhood Centre, Men's Shed, CFA, the old IGA and the Chemist. All groups have come together, initiated and led by Jackie to support the work of Lifeline Gippsland, contributing to the organisation's participation on the national 13 11 14 crisis line.

Jackie often brings together family, friends and community members to help run the op-shop, ensuring all funds raised go toward supporting the crisis line. Jackie is driven by her passion to be inclusive and engaging with her community and supports Lifeline's vision of a suicide free Australia. Jackie has volunteered approximately 25,000 hours with Lifeline Gippsland. Jackie also volunteers with other groups in Latrobe City.

Jackie is well known and loved by the Churchill community, due to what she gives to others, as well as her community spirit and willingness to help people.



**2026 Award Nominee –
Citizen of the year**

Margie Norder

Margie has been the heart of the volunteer program at the Churchill Neighbourhood Centre. In just two years she has taken them from a small group of around five volunteers to nearly thirty, creating spaces where people feel valued, supported, and part of something bigger than themselves.

Margie is one of those people who sees a situation that requires some supportive action and rather than walk on by her first instinct is "What can I do to help?" Whether it's participating in a community organisation or helping an individual, she is adept at making a difference.

Margie has been a driving force behind some of Churchill Neighbourhood Centre's biggest community projects — the revival of food bank, the introduction of the Container Deposit Scheme, and the development of the Disaster Recovery Trailer.

Margie has a history of giving back to the community through her contribution as an entrepreneur alongside her husband Pete. Margie has always supported the local community, giving back to a wide range of social enterprises and local clubs.

Margie's work has left a lasting mark on Churchill and will continue to shape the community for years to come.



**2026 Award Nominee –
Citizen of the year**

Linda Pink

Linda currently runs line dance classes throughout Gippsland, teaching a total of six levels ranging from beginners to intermediate level.

Linda also holds monthly social activities, that with the success of her teaching career, now bring other students from groups all around Victoria, and interstate.

Through the isolation that many felt during COVID, Linda put together a website – lvbootscooters.com, where she produced online dance instructional videos to keep people motivated. We all understand the importance of dance and music, to uphold our mental health and she was a ‘lifesaver’ to many.

Linda has always showed compassion to all who attend her classes. She understands that everyone learns at a different pace and has a special gift of teaching to make it possible for all to enjoy, with whatever ability a person has.

Her teaching style allows for variation in dances, to support those with joint limitations, keeping everyone moving. Over the years Linda has donated over \$125,000 to Lifeline through her dancing efforts.

She gives her services to other dance groups to teach workshops at their events. Local nursing and aged care homes have been gifted with Linda bringing her classes along for fun dance displays – enjoyed by all!



**2026 Award Nominee –
Citizen of the year**

Robert Sharrock

During his time working at one of the busiest school crossing areas in Latrobe City, Rob Sharrock realised that today’s generation of children didn’t seem to have embraced the love of reading that children of his generation had.

Rob set out to change that and for the past seven years has almost singlehandedly set up the Books4Kids project. Since its inception in late 2018 it has provided in excess of 80,000 free children’s books to many schools throughout Latrobe City to aid in reducing poverty based illiteracy in primary school aged children.

Rob’s volunteering history and assistance to the community is impressive including:

- Eight years as the Secretary of the inaugural Moe/Yallourn Rail Trail Committee of Management.
- Nine years with the Lions Club of Moe of which he is the current President. He is seen as one of the tireless workers at the fortnightly sausage sizzles in Moe, where the club has raised over \$1 million for the local community.

Now into his third year as a member of the Old Gipps town Heritage Park Committee of management and as a park volunteer, he regularly assists with the maintenance of the park’s gardens, buildings and artefacts.



**2026 Award Nominee –
Citizen of the year**

Kevin Taylor

Kevin has been a member of the Traralgon Lions Club for the last 13 years. He has been a dedicated member and has served as President of the Club twice, been a board member for 10 years, and Manager of the Traralgon Farmers market for the last 10 years.

During this time, he has also been heavily involved with the catering side of the Club, providing many hours to the catering of events and activities within his community.

Some of the key activities he is involved in include running the Annual Traralgon Carols by Candlelight event at Victory Park Traralgon, the Annual Traralgon Senior Citizens Christmas Party, and the annual Toy run. Kevin is also on Council's Victory Park Committee and is the liaison between the Lion's Club and Council.

Prior to this Kevin was a scout leader and involved in the Jaycees for several years whilst still holding a full-time job.

Since Kevin joined the Lions Club, he has dedicated his time to the club and has been awarded many highly respected awards, such as the Ian Stockdale Humanitarian Award, the Geoff Neal Award, the James Richardson Award and the Melvin Jones Awards.



**2026 Award Nominee –
Citizen of the year**

Diane Wilkinson

Diane has made lifelong contributions across many community organisations as a volunteer and major contributor including:

- Moe Fire Brigade Ladies' Auxiliary 1970's as a volunteer
- School Council, Albert Street Primary School, member and later president
- Secretary, Latrobe Valley Coordinating Committee
- 23 years voluntary work as a member of the Rotary Club of Moe. First female president – Diane successfully applied for Rotary District Grants on behalf of this club to beautify the Moe Botanic gardens and community development across Moe.
- Latrobe City Trust, voluntary member and recent Chairperson of the Philanthropic City Trust.
- Rotary Centenary House – Diane has been a member of the Board since its inception and is currently Chair of the Board of this significant Gippsland-wide facility.
- Latrobe Health Assembly, volunteer from its inception and member of the Board's Finance and Risk Committee
- Latrobe Valley Village Aged Care facility, Newborough – Diane is a volunteer for this Board and Chair's the Quality, Risk and Compliance Committee of the Board of Governance.
- Diane has been a volunteer customer representative with the Gippsland Water Authority and Chair's the Gippsland Water Reference Group.
- Community representative on the Moe Rail Precinct Development Project which led to the current skate park and other features next to the railway area in Moe.



LISTENING TO EACH
OTHER, AND SHARING OUR PART, THE
STORY OF AUSTRALIA, IS THE STORY OF
ME. IT'S THE STORY OF YOU. IT'S THE
STORY OF WE. IN PARTS IT IS PAINFUL,
PARTS IT'S RAW. IN OTHERS IT'S BEAUTIFUL,
INSPIRING GREAT ART. IT TELLS OF MA
PEOPLE, FROM FAR AND WIDE, AND THO
WHO'VE BEEN HERE SINCE THE BEGINNING
OF TIME. IT BRINGS US TOGETHER, AND
TEARS US APART. WE ALL HAVE OUR
VIEWS. SO WHERE DO WE START? BY
LISTENING TO EACH OTHER,
AND SHARING OUR PART,
THE STORY OF AUSTRALIA.
IS THE STORY OF ME. IT'S THE
STORY OF US. IN PARTS IT'S

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