

Standing above the crowd

This year the Goulburn Valley has been well represented by Australia Day Honours recipients. The diverse range of those people who have been recognised includes dairy farmers, ambulance officers and community leaders. There is not enough room to do a story on all of them, but here are just some.

Tireless mother puts her hand up

By Declan Martin

Pat Coffey received an Order of Australia Medal honour today for her many years of selfless volunteering.

The 74-year-old's biggest community commitments have been at Shepparton and Seymour where she has spent 48 years of her life and formed many important organisations.

"Volunteering is something I have done all my life, in every community I've lived in, it's in my genes, my parents brought me up that way and I've done the same with my children," she said.

Mrs Coffey, who lives in Seymour, was instrumental in forming the Citizens Advice Bureau in Shepparton in 1974, later renamed the Goulburn Valley Community Care Centre, and a pregnancy support group for mothers.

"Back then there was little social support for people and no Family Care," she said.

"We were there to listen and help people with all sorts of problems by referring them to services and pointing them in the right direction."

She said her own experience spurred her on to start a pregnancy support group in Shepparton.

BACK THEN THERE WAS LITTLE SOCIAL SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE AND NO FAMILY CARE

— PAT COFFEY

"I was having my fourth child at the time and realised there wasn't a lot of support out there for women — and that wasn't right."

She said it was a big commitment and the small team would go out to homes to teach expectant mothers how to look after their children or provide counselling, it didn't matter what their age was.

"I remember having to tell a 14-year-old girl's father about his daughter's pregnancy, because her mother wasn't living there anymore, that was nerve-wracking," she said.

"Twenty years later the same girl came in with her husband and oldest child and she had done so much with her life."

"That really stands out for me, you always hear about the bad stories, but this really positive one definitely sticks with me."

Mrs Coffey also remembers a 35-year-old woman who came looking for support.

"She was worried because of her age and said everyone expected her to know what to do," she said.

The pregnancy support group was eventually coordinated by the Carolyn Chisholm Family and Pregnancy Support Service.

During her time in Shepparton, Mrs Coffey and husband Michael contributed to Community Aid Abroad, now Oxfam, and were involved in countless sports organisations as scorekeepers and in other roles for tennis, netball and basketball.

Mrs Coffey was also on the Parents and Friends Committee of Notre Dame College for several years as her children grew up.

One triumph she remembered on the committee was transforming the tuck shop into a "green tuck shop" and cutting out most of the junk food offered — despite a lot of resistance.

When the family moved to Seymour in 1996 Mrs Coffey was part of the first committee of the three-year government-funded Seymour's Neighbourhood Renewal project that highlighted issues the community faced and encouraged



Champion: Pat Coffey has received an OAM on Australia Day for her volunteering efforts.

Picture: Declan Martin

disadvantaged residents. She was also on the first committee of the Seymour Visitor Information Centre that started 20 years ago and has continued to volunteer for the service.

Mrs Coffey regularly

spends 60 hours a week volunteering and is happy to work outside of the 9 am to 5 pm work week — although, she has had to cut back her hours recently.

Her latest project is Seymour's University of the

Third Age where she has held the roles of secretary, vice-president and president.

"It's something I've really enjoyed; at first I thought it was just for academics, but it's not, everyone can access it," she said.

'Face of Ambulance Victoria' always on call

By Declan Martin

Salvatore 'Guy' Zuccala said he was truly humbled after being awarded the Ambulance Service Medal for his 27 years of dedicated service.

"When I found out about it, even the award nomination, I was blown away," he said.

"This is the highest honour within the ambulance service, I know the people who have this award, they're incredible professionals like the CEO of the service."

Mr Zuccala started working with the ambulance service in Melbourne.

He left for 10 years before returning in 1998, this time to Seymour, and he hasn't left since.

In Seymour he holds the role of clinical support officer for the Southern Hume region and is a trained Mobile Intensive Care Ambulance MICA paramedic, well equipped for whatever the



Highest honour: Salvatore 'Guy' Zuccala will receive the Ambulance Service Medal.

situation requires.

Mr Zuccala said he was enjoying being able to impart knowledge and mentor other paramedics.

Being in a rural area that included plenty of highway he said he was often at major

incidents to support paramedics and had the expertise to make important decisions such as inducing a coma.

"Sometimes it can just be mental support for the paramedics on the scene," Mr

Zuccala said.

He said it was a tough job but there were moments that resonated with you forever.

He recalled a memorable moment reviving a man who was suffering a cardiac arrest on the footpath near the

ambulance station.

"We managed to use the defibrillator to bring him back, he recovered, and knocked on our door at the station, years later," Mr Zuccala said.

"I answered the door and said, 'Hey mate, what can do for you?'. I couldn't remember him because we help so many."

"He told me about himself and we sat down at a table." Mr Zuccala said the man was speechless after that.

"He came there to show some gratitude for saving his life. I said, 'You don't have to say anything' — and we just sat there and cried," he said.

Mr Zuccala said being a paramedic in the country was more challenging than in the city.

"It's a small community where everyone knows everyone," he said.

"You're the face of Ambulance Victoria and if people want to talk to you it isn't hard for them to find you, often-times you're on call 24

hours a day, even on days off."

Another challenge in the country was arriving at the scene of an accident and wondering if there was a personal connection to the patient.

He said while there were challenges of the job it was truly rewarding being able to make a difference to someone's life.

Mr Zuccala is highly regarded by Ambulance Victoria for his passion and commitment to the job. He is renowned for never being off duty.

Outside of active duty he is involved in Australian Catholic University's Digger's Trail Wilderness Exercise training activity.

The experience is part of the paramedic training curriculum at the university where he also delivers guest lectures and practical laboratories.

Mr Zuccala will officially receive the award at Government House in April or May.